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Man and the Bible



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# MAN AND THE BIBLE



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*A Review of the Place of the Bible  
in Human History*



BY

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# MAN AND THE BIBLE

## CHAPTER I

### THE BIBLE OF OUR FATHERS

PROBABLY no lines in *The Cottar's Saturday Night* so much endeared Scotland's national poet to his countrymen as the picture of the family gathering around the father-priest of the household, while, with bonnet reverently doffed, he opens the "big ha'-Bible" before him and searches the sacred pages for some word in season. Nor was it Scotland only that vibrated to the touch of that gifted player on the human heart. But throughout the western world, to which one great gift of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries had been an open Bible, Burns' description of family worship in a cottage-temple kindled emotions of remembrance and repentance in the hearts of all who read. For few indeed there were, at least in English-speaking lands, who were not thereby reminded of the most sacred moments of childhood, when the great Book was laid on the table amidst a hushed group of children and servants or friends, while the father or grandfather, in unforgetten tones, read forth the Psalmist's aspiration, or St Paul's conscience-compelling words, or some crystalline simple sayings of

the Lord Jesus, or St John's fascinating obscurity, which stirred even where it did not teach.

In fine, the interest and power of those verses of Robert Burns depended on the entirely peculiar and unrivalled place held by the Bible in the hearts of a very large part of the human race. Of the limitations of its kingdom both in space and time, it will be inevitable that we should hereafter speak. But the religious history of the western world, and especially of the Britains—great and greater, with their mighty offspring, the grandest republic known to history—is more than enough to justify what has been said. Indeed, to this reverent affection of whole peoples for the Bible there is absolutely no parallel and no analogy elsewhere. For it would be futile to compare therewith the soldierly respect felt by the Mussulman for the orders given him by his Koran, or the mixture of literary pedantry and mystic aspiration with which the Vedantist or Buddhist scholar studies the ancient lore of his creed. Of the moral power exercised, within certain limits, by old eastern scriptures revealed in latter days to us by the industry of great scholars, there need be no question. But, for reasons far other than those imagined by our fathers, the Bible has found a place in the heart, soul, conscience, and affections of common men, women, and children of the west, such as no Veda, nor Zend Avesta, nor Chinese classics, nor Koran ever had a chance of attaining.

For it is not principally awe nor fear which is felt toward this household god, "the Holy Bible." It is rather the sort of reverence in which gratitude and affection so mingle as they do in our feeling toward a dear friend, too great to be questioned, yet too familiar for chill respect. Thus, from the first dawn of conscious-

ness, children have classed it with the sky and the stars among their emerging conceptions of things great and wonderful. For instance, the same sort of infantine contemplation which regarded the stars as "eyelet holes to let through the glory of heaven," saw in the Bible a letter from God to tell his children how to reach that heaven. To suppose that an understanding of the sacred words was needed to excite this early worship would be to forget our own early childhood, and totally to misapprehend the average individual course of mental growth. For who among the departing generation does not remember how the first chapter of the Fourth Gospel used to be considered long ago as peculiarly fitted for infant reading because it consists so largely of monosyllabic words? Nor was the venerable chapter without spiritual influence, incomprehensible though its doctrine was. Because in some way it partly lifted a veil between the little everyday world of the child and "the immensities," of which the vastness of ocean, or twinkling stars, or wonder about the beginning of things had already given some hint.

But when understanding began to make the budding mind more articulate, what a large accession of interest—at least in families like that of Burns' Cottar—did the Bible receive from a desire to realise how the wonderful events related therein actually occurred; how long ago, in what order of succession, how the detached parts could be fitted together, and how variant narratives could be pieced into one harmonious whole. From such questions the family Bible class, an institution once very largely prevalent on Sunday afternoons among the excellent of the earth, derived much of its innocent excitement. And many whitebeards cherish still the stout, plainly bound

little Bible, once the treasure of their childhood, where in the margins are still legible the sprawling pencilled figures in which they noted the exact dates of creation, the Deluge, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and the Exodus, as they were announced by the unimpeachable authority of the priest-father. To that sort of prehistoric consciousness from which distinct memory gradually dawns, there was no suspicion of any difficulty about the two variant accounts of creation at the beginning of Genesis. For what could be clearer than that the second chapter takes up in detail the experiences of the First Man, concerning whom the introductory narrative announces with solemn brevity that "God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him"? And so with regard to many other palpable seams, even then scrutinised with microscopic intensity by devotees of truth in far-away universities, the revered pastor of the British church in the household mentioned them only to excite the sort of submissive interest proper to a book which, being divine, could not possibly be judged according to any analogy of human authorship. In like manner the attribution of precisely the same matrimonial troubles from amorous kings to both Abraham and Isaac, against which both father and son are said to have tried to guard by precisely the same deceit; as also the imperfectly combined variant traditions of the Deluge, together with the impossibilities of the encounter between Moses and Pharaoh, excited remark, indeed, or wonder, but not incipient criticism. For certainly "God's book" could not be expected to be as other books.

Meanwhile, the holy or the venerated beings who moved majestically upon the stage of this old world drama, though unrealisable in any sense that could bring



them into discord with fact, were yet imaginable enough to touch the affections and to people the fairyland of day-dreams. Thus how many a child was innocently daring enough to think of God as his own greater Father ! "He that dwelleth in the secret place of the Most High shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty." To such biblical words as these many a sensitive child would give a literal interpretation little suspected by his instructors. In his day-dreams he lived in God's palace, beneath God's eye, within sound of God's voice. There were around the sacred domain green meadows and blue sea, and grottoes and caves echoing with the splash of water, all for the child's pleasure. And he had them because he loved God, and God loved him. What God forbade, he would not do. No prohibited fruit would he take. Into no closed, mysterious avenues would he peer. And this from no fear of the all-seeing eye, but from eager loyalty of soul. Yet so large was the liberty in God's palace, where the child's day-dreams ranged, that duty was never thought of as a fetter. Indeed, without knowing it, he anticipated later studies which showed that "where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty."

Strange that it was so much more easy to be familiar with God than with Abraham, or Isaac, or Jacob ! But so it was. These were sacred heroes indeed, who must have been good—even Jacob—because they were so much favoured by God. But though it was, of course, all right, still the child rather shrank from an earthly father who was so ready to slay and burn "his son, his only son." David, however, the man "after God's own heart," was very much after the child's heart too. In fact, as portrayed to us in Hebrew tradition, there was a good deal of the boy about him, in his eagerness, in

his inconsequence, in his adventurousness, in his sentimental friendship, in his inconsistent notions of fairplay, exhibited in fits of bullying and chivalry. Besides, there was so much action in David's career as to keep the boy's interest constantly alert. For the giant-killer, the Jewish Robin Hood, the bold climber from the sheepfold to the throne, was, even from a secular point of view—had that been conceivable then—as attractive as Whittington or Robinson Crusoe. But when this romantic interest was suffused with the glory of the Psalms, nearly all of which David was supposed to have chanted to his harp, the result was a royal saint, consecrated by tradition, authority, religion, and music to childish hero-worship.

Such reminiscences of a bygone generation will not be found useless to our study of the relations of Man and the Bible. But time and space would fail us to tell in detail of the wonderland in which vaguely conceived kings and prophets glimmered in "a light that never was on land or sea"; how Solomon's abominations were ignored in recitations of his youthful vision and his admirable choice of understanding as better than gold; how the pious little Abijah was almost envied, blessed as he was with an early death "because in him was found some good thing toward the Lord God of Israel in the house of Jeroboam"; how Isaiah's broken music was transfigured under instruction into a premature gospel; and how isolated passages from unintelligible later prophets were made applicable to the joys and sorrows of family life, nay, to the successes or disappointments of the classroom, and even the provocations of the playground. "*All thy children shall be taught of God; and great shall be the peace of thy children.*"<sup>1</sup> Why, naturally

<sup>1</sup> Is. liv. 13.

such a promise was the very word of God to the priest-father expounding the passage, though, of course, the peace must be conditional. "*He that toucheth you toucheth the apple of his eye.*" The child whose first consciousness of religion had been the day-dream of dwelling in the palace of God felt no presumption in taking to himself such a comfortable assurance of divine defence. "*The Lord thy God in the midst of thee is mighty ; he will save ; he will rejoice over thee with joy, he will rest in his love, he will joy over thee with singing.*" What earthly father could have more tenderness, and what earthly father possessed such power to make that tenderness triumphant ? Thus, in his half-awakened intelligence, the child might with full heart join in singing of his Bible :—

“ ’Tis a broad land of wealth unknown,  
Where springs of life arise ;  
Seeds of immortal bliss are sown  
And hidden glory lies.”

Or if from sacred legend, psalm, and prophecy he was led to the feet of the earthly trinity—child, woman, and man in one—the Christ whose glory dominated the Old Testament no less than the New, the child had nothing to unlearn. For this human God was the God he had always known in his day-dreams ; and the only shade of sadness in his feeling toward the gospels was a touch of envy toward those long-ago children who were actually held in God’s arms. As to the crucifixion, it was not realised as a cruel, agonising death. It was part of the golden legend, necessary—the child-mind did not ask why—to consummate the loving work of the human God, and take his erring children back to heaven. The subtleties of theology had not yet troubled the simplicity

that looked through the innocent eyes. Jesus was God, and God was Jesus. And therefore all the dark sayings of the Old Testament, over which the child so strangely loved to pore, must needs have the same meaning as the words of the Lord Jesus. The two records of divine utterance differed only as the music of a marching band jangled by multiple echoes among dark defiles of savage rocks, differs from the same music when it issues into the open plain.

But then at last came a time when the boy's Bible was no longer a realm of day-dreams. For understanding and conscience, ripening fast, became susceptible to obscure but fearful issues of salvation or perdition. Not that the Book alone would have pressed such questions, at least in the form in which they began to trouble the growing soul. For, left to itself, the opening mind would still have interpreted St Paul by the loving kindness of the great Father in whose palace the infant had passed such happy days. No harm could come, either in this world or any other, to one who was on such terms with God, and had no thought but to do God's will. But the growing soul was not left to its own communings with the Father. For preachers and Sunday-school teachers, and even parents, were much concerned about its "conversion," and earnestly unfolded the "plan of salvation" in such a manner that they inadvertently turned it into a plan of damnation. "By nature we are all children of wrath," said they; "and unless this primal curse inherited from Adam be cancelled by repentance and by our appropriation through faith of the atoning sacrifice of Christ, there is no hope for us, but only a certain looking for of judgment and fiery indignation." And the still sensitive boy, who re-



membered, though he could not renew, his infant day-dreams, was often warned, especially by "revivalist" preachers, that "it is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God." Such an aspect of God had never presented itself to the dawning religious consciousness of childhood. But the youth who had begun to learn grammar, nay, even a little Greek, saw with a shock that such words really stood in his beloved Bible. And he yielded to the exhortations which besought him to "flee from the wrath to come."

How he wished such a flight were as easy as that of Christian from the City of Destruction! For with him the *Pilgrim's Progress* was only second to the Bible in his affections. And though his understanding could not quite clearly discern between an allegory and a historic fact, such as he supposed Abraham's pilgrimage from Ur of the Chaldees to be, still he cherished the wish that this fleeing from the wrath to come could take such an outward and visible form as the words suggested. And here he and his companions in sport or study went apart on divers spiritual progresses, all with the same heavenly goal in view, but passing through sharply contrasted experiences. Because some were taught that they had already been regenerated in baptism, and they received the comfortable and reasonable assurance that they were already the children of God and inheritors of the kingdom of heaven. All, therefore, that they had to do was to take now upon themselves the holy vows formerly made on their behalf by their sponsors, to become proficient in the formularies of the Church, to receive confirmation at the hands of a consecrated bishop, to enter into closer communion through the Eucharist with the ever-living Christ, and loyally to observe his precepts.

This was not a little. But it was light as air compared with the burden laid on less fortunate friends. For some of these latter, in the nervous excitement of "revival" seasons, felt, in a sense never dreamed of by the Psalmist, that "the terrors of hell gat hold upon" them. I do not suppose that the Psalmist quoted was ever afraid to go to sleep lest he should wake up in the flaming company of Satan and his angels. Indeed, it does not require much Hebrew scholarship, or perhaps not any, to preclude such a notion as that. But such was not unfrequently the fate of youthful "anxious inquirers" who were struggling for an assurance of conversion and salvation. And as this spiritual nightmare denatured heaven and earth, so it deformed the Book treated by the child as "God's letter," which had kindled endless sweet fancies and hopes. For the young victims of the belief in an everlasting hell scanned the Bible now as a book of charms, amongst which the right formula of deliverance must at last be found. They prayed till they fell asleep on their knees, and wakened to bemoan their "hardness of heart." Till, at last, under some Pentecostal whirlwind of "revival" excitement in a crowded chapel, a mysterious convulsion seized them. They were almost torn like the demoniac from whom a peculiarly obstinate devil was cast out. But when it was over, they felt themselves in heaven, and shouted "glory, glory," in eager response to the saints bending over them.<sup>1</sup> In some cases, perhaps in most, the beatification was not eternal. Still, only prejudice would deny that there were a certain number

<sup>1</sup> Few readers can remember, as I can, the earlier half of the nineteenth century. But if they think such scenes as the above unreal, let them refer to any accessible accounts of the Welsh revival in so recent a year as 1905.

of cases in which such strange experiences proved to be a real salvation, so far as we can judge by this present life.

Then there were others again who found comfort neither in the ecclesiastical fold nor in ecstatic conversion. For family tradition excluded them from the one, and temperament, including perhaps a difficulty in self-deception, denied them relief from the latter. However much they tried, they found they could not repent of Adam's sin, though they heartily condemned it. And though they were quite sure they had sins enough of their own, they could not feel them drop off as the pilgrim Christian did at the sight of the Cross. To such it happened that pastors or chapel officials, anxious to add them to "the Church," suggested that conversion need not always be instantaneous like St Paul's; and that the Ethiopian eunuch underwent no terrors nor excitement before his conversion, but only experienced a new light on the Scriptures, with which he was already familiar. In such a way were satisfied many candidates for church membership among Nonconformists; and they received "the right hand of fellowship" without ever having been converted at all. Perhaps they did not need it.

But one and all who entered, whether through church or chapel door, on the self-conscious Christian life, felt it to be one of their holiest privileges to magnify "the word of God" in season and sometimes out of season, as the exponent of the plan of salvation, the foundation of right, the sanction of the moral law, the charter of their country's greatness, the bond of social order, the consecration of the family, the only essential in education, the most blessed treasure God had given to man. Of this pathetic devotion the institution of family worship, already discussed, is the most interesting instance; and by

all unprejudiced minds, whatever their creed or lack of creed, will be allowed to have been fruitful in culture of morals and of the emotions. True, the reading of the Bible was only a part of this cult. But every priest-father would have emphatically protested that, compared with the divine word, his own feeble utterances in prayer, or even those consecrated by his church, were but as the chaff to the wheat. Also "professing Christians" to whom the right of private judgment was precious—or, as they would have preferred to put it, the privilege of personal guidance by the Holy Ghost—esteemed it both a duty and a joy to search the Scriptures for themselves.

How great was the consolation found by the tearful mother, in parting from her boy called to some far-off adventure by sea or land, when he gave her his word that no day should pass without the reading of some portion of the pocket Bible affectionately inscribed with his name, and forming her last best gift! For it was not merely as a moral chart of life that she regarded it, or as a repository of wisdom. Of such there were many in modern literature, and most of them framed on what were thought to be biblical lines. But though they might contain the very essence of holy writ, no pious mother would have been satisfied that her boy should have substituted any of these for the Bible. For, after all, these were human works, and the Bible was not. It was God's letter to mankind, if not traced with his finger—a distinction reserved for the Ten Commandments alone—at least dictated by his Spirit to holy men of old, who wrote not their own words but God's. It was this afflatus of divinity, breathing the very life of God into the words, that made it so utterly different from any other book, not only in degree but in kind. And be it



remembered that the cruel discernment of German critics had not yet reached, even as a rumour of horror, the ordinary Bible devotees of that generation. Though how mere common-sense could have missed the obvious suggestions in the text itself of a gradual and natural evolution of Bible religion, has been in later life a puzzle to not a few of those devotees themselves. But so it was. The average Bible worshipper, Protestant though he was, had not even heard of Luther's irreverent sneers at the Epistle of St James, or of Calvin's sparks of rationalism, or of John Knox's doubts whether James and John were moved by the Holy Ghost when they counselled St Paul to deceive the Jews by an occasional conformity to the Mosaic Law.

In this section of the present treatise we have nothing to do with the changes of opinion which have of late years to some extent rationalised veneration for the Bible. Those changes will receive attention in due course. But meantime I am dealing only with the popular idea of a book dictated by God, and therefore capable of exerting a beneficent influence not merely by its truth or wisdom or appeals to the affections, but by the miraculous and inexplicable power that words dictated by God must needs possess. Instances of this fond confidence in mere sacred words, as though they were incantations or charms, may still be seen in some railway-station waiting-rooms, where detached verses from the Bible are hung up by pious enthusiasts in the hope that a hurried glance may prove to be the salvation of a soul. Yet such words often have no rational meaning apart from the context. As for instance, "Except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish;" where the word "likewise" is sufficient to suggest the incompleteness of the passage. And the few

who care by memory or reference to verify the quotation, find that the context thus arbitrarily ignored has nothing to say about the end of the world, or about the judgment-day and perdition, but deals only with the coming fate of a sanctimonious and hypocritical nation. Moreover, they were not originally spoken of such toilworn wayfarers as those who rest for a bad quarter of an hour in a railway waiting-room, but of precisely such pious zealots and fanatics as those who hang up threatening texts, to the terror of the weary.

But many superstitions have an amiable side ; and this has certainly been true of bibliolatry. For both in public movements, in social progress, and in private self-culture of humblest souls, the notion of a divine book, through which God in very deed does daily talk to men, has given to human affairs an impulse which, though far from infallible, and sometimes distorted both by ecclesiastics and fanatics to cruel purposes, has on the whole stimulated the pursuit of a moral ideal higher than that of each successive generation of readers. Reserving, then, for later pages any criticism of the influence exerted by the Bible in public life, I desire here to dwell for a little on the sort of quickening influence exerted by the habit of Bible-reading among the dim millions who make up the mass of the people. For it was the one book accessible to them which seemed to bring them under the shadow of the Almighty, and within the sweep of eternity. And most of those whose memory goes back to the earlier part of the last century can recall the solemn or pathetic, and—as must be confessed—sometimes ludicrous, use made of scriptural texts in the little vicissitudes of family life.

Such survivors of a bygone time will remember how it

was the custom of many an afflicted one in humble life, when confronted with bereavement, loss, or persecution for conscience' sake, to kneel before the open Bible as before a sacred shrine, and to gather comfort, strength, and courage by alternating prayer with the reading of "the promises." Indeed, one case I remember in which the bigotry of Christian brethren concerning microscopic points of doctrine, or alleged "want of unction," or I know not what, so tortured their minister that he, poor soul, thus kneeling, read through the story of Christ's sufferings for him, seeking thus to put to shame the cowardly weakness lurking within the carnal man. And with what power came to him then the words of the epistle: "For even hereunto were ye called, because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example that ye should follow his steps"! True, in those days the alternative to hypocrisy could not be the stake nor the gallows. But loss of livelihood and misery to a family was to a loving father almost worse.

But the worship of the Bible by the unknown many was not always so noble as this. One venerable elder I remember, who always, on the morning of his departure from any family he had been visiting, would solemnly read at household worship the twentieth Psalm, which superficially seemed appropriate enough. For it was pleasing to hear what sounded like a paternal blessing: "The Lord hear thee in the day of trouble; the name of the God of Jacob defend thee." But when God was asked to "remember all the burnt offerings" of that family and to "accept their burnt sacrifice," the application was not obvious. And even if this were explained by a reference to deeds of self-denial, the succeeding verses about setting up banners and the overthrow of an enemy by a warrior

king should have made it plain, even to readers of the English version, that the psalm was originally a sort of Hebrew "God save the King," only much more grandly expressed than the doggerel that satisfies us. Now when plain English could so effectively conceal meaning, other and worse distortions of Scripture were sure to follow. And so I remember how the same venerable elder, in reading Psalm ciii., paused after the words, "He will not always chide, neither will he keep his anger for ever," to expound the words as meaning that the Lord will not always limit himself to chiding, but will take much more decisive measures ; nor will he much longer keep back his anger, but will launch his thunderbolts of wrath.

From our point of view, the mediæval Church was wholly wrong in denying to its humblest members free access to the Bible. But it would be mere bigotry on our part to deny that the Scriptures are very liable to misinterpretation by ignorance, or that the communion of the unlettered man with his Bible is often a strange medley of the sublime and the grotesque. Perhaps I cannot better illustrate this than by quoting the meditations of a Bible-reading old man whom I knew in my earliest years, and who had no other literature, unless religious tracts and magazines can be so called. But, humble and ignorant as he was, his lucubrations are to me very noteworthy in considering the relations of the Bible and the People.

The Bible I have before me belonged to a journeyman house-painter, Thomas Dickinson by name, who has long ago joined the "choir invisible." For it is fifty-eight years since, as a boy, I made his acquaintance, and he was an old man then. He had no education beyond the attainments of reading and writing, with the barest



rudiments of arithmetic. He had been converted in middle age at some Methodist "revival." But for some reason he preferred to attend an Independent chapel, into which he endeavoured, with much disappointment to himself, to infuse something of Wesleyan fire. Notwithstanding his age, his religious fervour and resonant utterance, whether in prayer or exhortation, were such as to win for him amongst us the epithet "Boanerges." And when the dear pastor, possessing the culture of a Scottish university, had finished a correct sermon, unimpeachable in doctrine, but too like Isaiah's idol "with no breath at all in the midst of it," how would the old zealot exclaim, on leaving the chapel gates, "It's n' use a dilly-dallyin' a this road! And sows perishin' all the time!"

But such anecdotes are only intended to suggest what manner of man he was whose Bible I have before me. For if, through fervour of temperament and some original though untrained capacity, he was slightly different from the average man in the street, yet his childlike belief in the Bible as "God's letter to mankind," and his acceptance of every word of the English version, from Genesis to Revelation, as on an equal level of infallible inspiration, exactly represented the religion of the multitude in his day. It is in this view that the observations of the old man inscribed on the margins of his Bible appear to me interesting and suggestive.

It is noteworthy that nearly all the marginal comments and affectionate markings of favourite passages are confined to the Old Testament. Nor is this to be explained by the death of the devout reader before his systematic study was ended. For there are clear evidences of careful attention to the New Testament as

well. Indeed, at the top of the first page of St Matthew's gospel are written these uncouth lines, whether quoted or original I cannot tell :—

“Oh ! when can I that form behold  
Which hung for me upon the cross ?  
I heed not gems nor pearls nor gold”—

a sufficient testimony at any rate that the gospels were not undervalued. Was it a survival of Cromwellian Puritanism, this curious partiality for the Hebrew Scriptures ? I think not. I believe it rather originated in a sort of intellectual pleasure which was found in discovering amid the obscurities of the Old Testament sparks of Gospel light. Take the following words (Deut. x. 7) : “And from thence they journeyed unto Gudgodah ; and from Gudgodah to Jotbath, a land of rivers of waters.” What spiritual application seems possible to this obscure fragment of a lost itinerary ?<sup>1</sup> The modern culture of the Scottish university minister would have disdained to attempt it. But the humble house-painter saw it at once. “At conversion”—so he writes in the margin of his Bible ; and I think it better to keep the spelling—“the sinner begins an important journey. He leaves a state wherein are no watersprings of divine influences to journey in the land of uprightness, a land of rivers of waters. And further as he journeys in this land the wider and deeper do these rivers flow.” But the determination to read the New Testament into the Old is not always shown in this poetic guise. The somewhat stolid assumption that every word of the Hebrew records had an outlook toward the wonder days of Galilee, Calvary, and Bethany is seen in a singular preface

<sup>1</sup> See *Encyc. Biblica*, s.v. Gudgodah.

scribbled at the top of the first chapter of Genesis. The special reference is to the words once quoted by a pagan philosopher as an instance of literary sublimity: "And God said, Let there be light, and there was light." But, with perhaps pardonable unsusceptibility to literary form, the pious house-painter reflected thus:—

"The moral world is without all Spiritual form; it has no resemblance to the glorious image of its Creator; and it is void, completely void of all Spiritual life, light, order, and beauty, and will remain so until the Spirit of God moveth upon it in his new creative energies. When God saith to an individual, to a family, to a community, to a world lying in chains of darkness, 'let there be light,' then there is light; the darkness passeth away, and the true heavenly glorious light shineth into multitudes of Souls."

The old man had apparently never reached the stage of mental development at which perplexity is caused by the contrast between the facility of such a method of salvation and the infrequency of its application. On the contrary, the darker aspects of mediæval theology, if they did not yield a grim sort of pleasure, were at any rate not wholly repugnant to this late representative of stern Puritan faith. A gloomy comment follows on the wail of Cain that his punishment is greater than he can bear: "The punishment of lost souls in hell will be greater; but the (they) shall be able to bear it." By which I understand that my old friend would not have tolerated the annihilation theory which came into vogue some years after his death. But we may find relief in the childlike note on the threat to the serpent of the woe to be wrought on him by the woman's descendants—a threat which hardly needs any theological interpretation: "This is the first gospel

sermon ever preached, and God was the preacher." And the benevolence which could coexist with belief in a physical hell, that tortured without destroying, is manifest in a prayer breathed after reading of the entry of Noah with his belongings into the ark: "Hasten the day, O Lord, when heads of families and all their offspring shall enter into the Ark of thy salvation, even Christ Jesus!" Yet his notions of that divine mercy to which he prayed were certainly paradoxical; for on God's rejection of the intercession of Moses, "Let me alone that I may destroy them," the comment is: "O, if God's people where to let him alone, if the where to cease to interceed for siners, what sore and sudden misery would come upon them! If so, how much is the world of the unregenerate indebted to the godly,—despise and hate them as they may!" The prosaic geographical enumeration of territories given in Deut. iv., ending with "all the plain on this side Jordan eastward, even unto the sea of the plain under the springs of Pisgah," occasions the following outburst:—

"About the springs of the earthly Pisgah I know nothing, but of Christian's Pisgah, blessed be God, I know something—the are soul refreshing Springs, Soul transforming Springs, Soul gladdening and Soul ravishing Springs—Haste my soul up Pisgah's mount and view the promised land."

Very much that is said in Mr Prothero's interesting story of "The Psalms in Human Life" receives humble though not on that account the less striking illustration from this poor man's Bible. For there is no book in the volume more scored or annotated than the Psalms. Little could the singer of Psalm ciii., whoever he was, foresee, when he chanted "thy youth is renewed like the eagle's," that after more than two millenniums had flown



he would draw such a rhapsody as this from an obscure house-painter, born in a then inconceivable world :—

“May my flights be like unto the eagle’s; may my strength be like unto the eagle’s; then I shall at all times mount very high in the holy atmosphere of sweet communion with God, even above the clouds and dwell near the throne, while my body lies grovelling here below. This is my privilege, and this will shurly be my portion and experience if I seek for it and live for it; for I have the promise of God, and He cannot lie.”

It is an interesting illustration of what the title “word of God,” as applied to the Bible, meant to the “man in the street,” that a poetic figure of a Hebrew poet is accepted as a definite and palpable promise of God.

Lastly, a very noteworthy feature of these records is a total insensibility to any literary beauties in the sacred book. One of the most intensely interesting and beautiful personalities of the present age, Miss Helen Keller, of Alabama, who, though blind and deaf from two years old, became a collegian, a graduate with honours, and a considerable scholar, writes in the story of her life that in her second year at Radcliffe College she began to study “the Bible as English literature.” A strange description, surely, for a collection of translations from Hebrew and Hellenistic works. But herein Miss Keller only follows the fashion prevalent on this side of the ocean. For when every other plea for the use in unsectarian schools of a book which in the present state of opinion must needs be sectarian has been silenced, we are told that the Bible is an “English classic,” and as such must be included in national education. Well, it is quite possible that if the late Professor Jowett’s advice could be taken, and the Bible be “treated like any other book,” cultivated teachers

might arouse the interest at least of children in their teens in the unconscious majesty of some parts of the Bible, in the imperishable human interest of others, in the more laboured but lofty poetry of Job, in the harp-like music of Isaiah, and in the incomparable narrative style of the gospels.

But the insuperable difficulty in the way is the stubborn fact that at present the Bible cannot be "treated like any other book," but that its miraculous claims always predominate over its literary interest. Indeed, so far is this the case that, apart from certain incipient efforts to rationalise veneration for the Bible, efforts quite outside our purview in this chapter, the man in the street feels towards his "book divine" precisely as did the venerable zealot whose notes I have quoted. And how utterly insusceptible he was to any thrill of literary interest in the Scriptures is well seen in his treatment of the hundred and fourth Psalm, a survey of Nature which even in these days of scientific revelation still makes the heart glow with the vision of a physical beauty and wonder instinct with a soul of goodness. But for Thomas Dickinson, the psalmist's picture of the perennial resurrection of the Spring—"Thou sendest forth thy Spirit, they are created; and thou renewest the face of the earth"—had only a theological value :—

"When God sendeth his Spirit upon sinners they are created anew in Christ Jesus unto good works; and in proportion as he doth this, in that proportion is the face of the moral earth renewed in righteousness and holiness. Where the Spirit comes there is life, light, and fruitfulness."

I have thought it worth while to dwell at some length on what seems to me a typical instance of popular Bible

religion as existing within the lifetime of the last generation. Because though, in some respects, the man I have quoted was exceptional, substantially he represents the attitude of the million toward the Bible in the nineteenth century. Indeed, for reasons which we shall presently consider, that century was the very earliest period in which such a relation between the Bible and the people was possible. For never before had that collection of sacred traditions been made fully and unreservedly accessible to uncultured faith. And the chief cause of the amazing popularisation of the Bible in the course of the nineteenth century is well worth consideration.

There can be no doubt that the gift of the Bible to the "common people," the successors of those who heard Christ gladly, has been mainly the work of the British and Foreign Bible Society, whose story has been told in centenary memorials of that Society's achievements.

To religious Wales was due the first inception of the idea. For the Reverend Thomas Charles of Bala having in 1802 solicited help from the Religious Tract Society toward increasing the supply of Welsh Bibles—of which there would seem to have been a great dearth at that time—the Reverend Joseph Hughes, a Baptist minister of Battersea, being present, responded thus: "Surely a society might be formed for the purpose. But if for Wales, why not for the kingdom? Why not for the whole world?"<sup>1</sup>

These words, spoken in the counting-house of a godly and prosperous merchant at Old Swan Stairs, were as seed falling into good ground. For two years afterwards, in 1804, the Society was organised which, though by no means the first of its kind, certainly in the abundance of

<sup>1</sup> *The Story of the Bible Society*, by Wm. Canton, p. 3.

its labours and achievements exceeded all others put together. For I suppose there is hardly a language spoken anywhere on the round world by half a million people into which this Society has not translated "the word of God." And even dying dialects spoken only by the remnants of once numerous tribes, now nearly exterminated by Christian guns, alcohol, and disease, possess in requital at least this sacred lore, said to be the secret of our imperial might. Nay, some extinct languages now possess their only record in the library of the Bible Society. For though the Society has only within two years celebrated the centenary of its birth, it has lived long enough to see not a few wild tribes to whom it addressed the gospel of salvation perish to the last man before the superior prowess of Christian civilisation, which finds its divine charter in the same heavenly message.

But no such paradoxical events delayed for one moment the printing activities of the great Society. For if the Word could but reach the last dying remnants of a disappearing clan, no one could tell but that the charm of the sacred syllables might be the means of snatching one and another precious soul as brands from the burning. As compared with such a result, what mattered expenditure of money? Sceptical critics of the history of revelation might hint that the same Supreme Author who had communicated the message to a little group of clans in Judæa of old, and to their descendants in Galilee and Jerusalem, could easily have dispensed with the aid of the Bible Society by communicating directly with his heathen children said to be perishing for lack of knowledge. But such criticism, of course, ignored one essential feature of the plan of salvation, which was, that after God



had done his part, man should do the rest. For, as St Paul says, the progress is from "faith to faith," from one glowing heart to another ready to be kindled. Or, as he says in another place, "How shall they call on him in whom they have not believed? And how shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear without a preacher?" True, this slow process of communication from soul to soul necessarily incurred risks awful to contemplate in the light of the then prevalent doctrine of an everlasting hell. But those things belonged to the secret things reserved for the counsels of the Eternal, of which no mortal should dare to judge.

The British public is always open-hearted toward any forms of human need appealing to family experience of hunger, sickness, or bereavement. Hence the facility with which enormous sums have been raised for soup kitchens, destitute children's dinners, hospitals, and orphan homes. But the need to which the Bible Society ministered did not come within any of these categories. Nevertheless it touched the hearts of precisely that part of the public best able to furnish the sinews of this holy war. For it appealed to prosperous families who, every morning and evening, gave God thanks that they had been brought up on the "sincere milk of the word"; and to successful merchants who had found godliness profitable unto all things; and to self-made men who attributed all their success in life to their early acquaintance with God's Word through the lessons of the Sunday school. Not less it appealed to the congregations of the poor who crowded big chapels Sunday by Sunday to hear some heart-searching preacher draw from the sacred book before him a mystical wisdom such as no human under-

standing could have devised. And deep was the emotion of the hearers when such a preacher pictured the misery of those lands where there was a famine, "not of bread, nor a thirst for water, but of hearing the words of the Lord." To the myriads who day by day lived "not by bread alone but by every word which proceedeth out of the mouth of God," such a famine seemed more deadly than any dearth of bodily food, because it threatened not merely temporal death, but an eternity of woe. And so it came to pass that the Bible Society moved the soul of a people not less deeply than did orphanages and hospitals. For the mood in which its appeals were heard was susceptible to no practical doubts as to the number of readers among the heathen Eskimo, or the Kalmucks, or the Swahili. But as the old-fashioned husbandman took his chance when he flung out handfuls of seed upon ill-prepared ground, so the enthusiast of the Bible Society rejoiced to think of the tons and even shiploads of Bibles in outlandish tongues,—miraculous books to be scattered as living seed, in full confidence of a harvest from heathen ground. For had not God himself declared concerning his word, "it shall not return unto me void, but it shall accomplish the thing which I please, and it shall prosper in the thing whereto I sent it" ?

This united fervour of all sects was no doubt much fostered and maintained by the prudent rule of the Society adopted from the very beginning, that the copies of the Bible circulated should be wholly "without note or comment." Though, by the way, this did not exclude marginal references, which often form significant notes, and even at times amount to comment. But of course comparison of scripture with scripture could only make for truth ; and therefore no good Christian could fear

that by subscribing for his dozen or score or thousands of Bibles he was in any way favouring the peculiar tenets of any misguided brethren. Indeed, so much was co-operation promoted by this rule, that, contrary to the prejudiced belief still prevalent in Protestant circles, and in spite of the hesitation or even aversion of one or two popes, Roman Catholic priests have been known to lend ready help to the dissemination of the Society's Erse and Gaelic translations among their Irish and Highland flocks.<sup>1</sup>

Nevertheless, to the Bible Society has often been attributed such doubtful success as has attended British resistance to “papal aggressions” during the last two generations. “For,” says Mr Canton, “when principles of the Reformation were threatened ; when momentous questions which had slept for ages were reopened ; when claims long held in abeyance were pressed with startling boldness and importunity, there was roused, by some mysterious stimulus, so urgent a Bible movement in the great towns, that in three years from April 1844 to March 1847 there were distributed 1,900,776 copies of that book which must form the only standard of appeal.”<sup>2</sup> Not only so, but to this tidal wave of Bibles was attributed even the outwardly and apparently successful opposition to the Chartist demonstration of April 10, 1848. For “the Reverend Hugh Stowell declared that only a working clergyman could tell how much we owed, not to the promptitude of the magistracy, not to the wise and timely measures of the government,—these he be-

<sup>1</sup> *Story of the Bible Society*, p. 29.

<sup>2</sup> Observe that the unsectarianism of the great Society, like the “un-denominationalism” of “simple Bible teaching,” retains immovably the fundamental dogma of the miraculous and supreme authority of the book.

lieved would have been insufficient to keep the people, under the pressure of their sore distress, calm, tranquil, submissive,—it was the Bible Society that had done it.”<sup>1</sup> Now the Reverend Hugh Stowell, though a distinguished clergyman, was not one of the “goodly fellowship of the prophets”; and he could hardly be expected to foresee that within a generation almost every demand of the Chartists except “annual parliaments” would be practically conceded. Still less could he foresee that while aliens from the commonwealth of Israel would make it one of their taunts against the Bible that it kept the people “submissive,” wiser interpreters of the sacred volume would find in it a perpetual charter of popular revolt against public wrong.

Another strange feature of this interesting but in some respects paradoxical story is its oblivion of the Bible’s comparative failure to provoke the rich and ruling classes to reform abuses, though, as we have seen, it inspired the poor with patience to bear them. Not that we forget the fine philanthropy of such Christian men as Clarkson and Wilberforce, or, later, of the good Lord Shaftesbury. But we cannot help observing that the reforming zeal of such excellent men was excited either by flagrant horrors of oppression in distant parts of the earth, or by special and extreme symptoms of the disease and distortion of our home civilisation, such as the atrocious system of chimney-sweeping by climbing boys. But the root of these evils in the preposterous disproportion between the numbers wielding political power and those suffering the woes caused by its misuse was either entirely overlooked by the directors of “law and order” or its importance was minimised. Nay, the few who

<sup>1</sup> Quoted by Mr Canton in the *Story of the Bible Society*, p. 105.



doubted the perfection of our "glorious constitution in Church and State" were regarded as dangerous characters; and survivors from the former half of the nineteenth century can well remember how "radicals, socialists, and infidels" were lumped together as enemies of God and the Bible.

During the terrible years before the Reform Bill, when our country, under the sway of Bible-reading bishops, peers, and squires, was subject to the tortures of insane protection and tremendous internal taxation, the broadcast scattering of the Scriptures by the Bible Society is credited by its historian with the pathetic patience of the people under their wrongs.<sup>1</sup> Yet the thought will occur that if, as we learn, 583,880 copies of the Scriptures were circulated by the Society in 1831, mainly among the poor, the rich who ruled were in no need of such spiritual alms. For there was not a hall or mansion which did not show a Bible in nearly every room. And the dwellers in these "stately homes of England" learned from their Bible lessons much about the obedience of the subject, about the divinely ordained perpetuity of poverty, and about the sacredness of the social hierarchy. Such lessons confirmed their determination, in the interest of the existing state of things, to forbid the importation of foreign or even Irish cattle, to lay heavy duties on the poor man's bread, to tax salt up to four times its value, and to limit light and air in the cottage by a window tax. The religion of these Church and State men was, as far as it went, not less genuine than that of the Directors of the Bible Society, of which indeed these Church and

<sup>1</sup> *Op. cit.*, pp. 103-4. One can hardly repress the now useless prayer—Would to God they had been less patient! Their children and grandchildren would have been all the better off.

State men were very generally patrons. They learned from their Scriptures, according to an orthodox interpretation, to "bind heavy burdens and grievous to be borne, and to lay them on men's shoulders." And then we are told that it was mainly the blessed influence of this same Bible which kept the oppressed and miserable people quiescent under their woes. This is no reproach to that venerable book, in which are stored up so many pregnant but not always consistent utterances of hard-won human experience. But it is distinctly a reduction to absurdity of the superstitious notion that the Bible, wherever we open it, gives us the very voice of God.

That, however, was the idea of the Bible which prevailed among nine-tenths of the population down to the last quarter of the nineteenth century. This was shown not only by the prevalent faith in miracles of conversion to be wrought by mere dissemination of the sacred Book "without note or comment," but also by the general and almost universal custom of regarding a plain text from any part of the Bible as an end of all controversy on almost any subject whatever. Thus, in the days when factories and workshops gave much more opportunity to workmen for conversation and debate than is possible now, a quotation from Law, Prophets, Psalms, or New Testament, if it seemed to bear upon the point in dispute, whether temperance, socialism, republicanism, or fraternity and equality, would rarely or never be met by a denial of its divine authority.<sup>1</sup> The only resource for the disputants against whom such a quotation appeared to tell was to produce other texts which might modify it, or to

<sup>1</sup> This is matter of early personal experience and observation. For, though I never was myself a factory hand, I was in very close contact with workmen for thirty years.

throw doubt on the correctness of the translation, which reminiscences of Bible classes enabled even unlearned workmen to do.

And though amongst the more learned clergy and the cultured laity this notion of the Bible as being in every part the very word of God has been superseded by a more liberal, but more hazy conception, there can be no doubt that this degradation of these ancient books into a fetish has had much to do with the difficulties of national education, not only at home, but in every nominally Christian country. For what can be more unfair and injurious to any record of human experience than the practice of reading it to inexperienced children "without note or comment," as in the common schools of America? Or what can be more redolent of weak and timorous faith than the clamorous insistence of our sects that the State shall not, dare not, leave the Church to do its own work in its own way, but that, in addition to Church services, Sunday-school teaching and Bible classes, the State must needs dose children with "Bible and water"<sup>1</sup> in every day-school?

"*Exitus ergo quis est?*" What is the plain, practical result of enterprises and organisations based on the belief that the Bible is a miraculous book, the very word of God, with wonder-working power within itself to convert untaught heathen, and to ensure high morality in any population imbued with its lore from childhood? Neither the question nor the answer of palpable facts can cast the least reproach upon the real Bible as a most precious record of our main line of religious evolution. For its value in this respect is not here doubted. But the point

<sup>1</sup> A phrase of the first Sir Thomas Fowell Buxton in reference to platitudinarian expositions of Scripture.

is, that the very foundation of the Bible Society was a belief that the "Word of God, without note or comment," could work its way by a sort of miracle. You had only to send out to heathen lands a sufficient number of tons of the wonder-working book, and whole populations would be brought over to the faith of Christ. Accordingly, at the meetings of the Society, many pathetic stories were told of American Indians, African Negroes, and Hindoos and Dravidians who besieged the distributors of the book, and who met, when and how they could, like the primitive Christians, to hear a slightly lettered fellow-tribesman spell out the divine message. Considering the monotony of primitive life, and its natural eagerness to hear "some new thing," such excitement is entirely credible and readily conceived. But the inference inevitably drawn by the hearers of these stories of Bible triumphs, that the mere multiplication of the printed Scriptures was rapidly converting the world, has scarcely been justified by officially published facts.

- For the first census of the British empire issued at the beginning of March 1906 from the General Register Office gives the numbers of the king's subjects of all races and religions as more than 300 millions. And of these only 58 millions are registered as Christians, including the 42 millions or so in the United Kingdom and European dependencies. It is true that no religious census has for many years been taken in Great Britain and Ireland. But, with a generous liberality, this imperial census puts us all down as Christians at home. Canada, South Africa, New Zealand, and Australia contain many millions of American, Dutch, or Anglican Christians; and if to these be added the white official class and men of business in India, the 16 million imperial Christians out-



side Europe are practically accounted for, so that the converted heathen within an empire covering, as we are told, one-fifth of the land surface of the globe, can only be a few hundreds of thousands. On the other hand, the same official record tells us that there are 208 millions adhering to Hindu forms of religion, 94 millions of Mahommedans, 12 millions of Buddhists, besides 23 millions of various pagan and non-christian religions. In other words, after a century of Bible scattering and more laborious missions, the Christians within the empire, even reckoning in the long-established Christianity of the home countries, are less than one-fifth of its total population.

“ And is this little all that was to be ?  
 Where is the gloriously decisive change,  
 The immeasurable metamorphosis  
 Of human clay to divine gold, we looked  
 Should in some poor sort justify the price ?  
 Had a mere adept of the Rosy Cross  
 Spent his life to consummate the Great Work,  
 Would not we start to see the stuff it touched  
 Yield not a grain more than the vulgar got  
 By the old smelting process years ago ! ”

Nay, but in this instance the “ old smelting process,” if so we may call the struggle and martyrdom of the first hundred years after Pentecost, achieved moral and religious conquests which utterly put to shame the trivial gains of Christianity within the latest hundred years. For though, of course, no statistics are available, there can be little doubt that by A.D. 130 or 140 the Church had taken such a firm hold of Asia Minor,<sup>1</sup> Greece, Egypt, Italy, and North Africa, that its final victory was practically assured, and, as the

<sup>1</sup> See Pliny's well-known letter to Trajan.

devout would have put it, "the gates of hell could not prevail against it." And this moral triumph was achieved without organised missions, without Bible Societies, nay, without Bibles, except indeed the Septuagint, and fragments of the gradually evolved New Testament, of which the different portions were variously esteemed, and perhaps none had any established authority. But then in those days the Gospel was a new leaven working mightily in the mass of human affections, hopes, fears, and aspirations, all matured to just that stage of preparation to which the Gospel solution of the mystery of life was adapted. The case is not so now. And that is one of the facts we have to weigh and appreciate in discussing the relations of Man and the Bible.<sup>1</sup>

The result of our survey hitherto, then, is that the ubiquity of the Bible as a household treasure in Protestant countries, and its unchallenged supremacy in the affections and veneration of the common people, have been exceptionally characteristic of the nineteenth century, and are largely owing to the zeal, liberality, and devotion of the greatest of Bible Societies. On the other hand, it must, of course, be acknowledged that the marvellous success of that Society implies a predisposition on the part of the public to favour its work. Such a predisposition is also evidence that, to use a Gospel simile,

<sup>1</sup> If it should be asked why the success of missionary and Bible Society operations outside the British empire is not estimated, the answer is that equally authoritative statistics are not available. But if to the one-fifth of the solid earth covered by the empire we add the enormous area of the United States and Russia, there is really very little room left in which to redress the failure above quoted. The romantic story of Christianity in Madagascar has been familiar from childhood, and is profoundly stirring. But what is that, or the tale of the South Sea Islands, to balance the portentous failure of Christian missions to touch more than a fringe of the enormous and dense population of China?

“the fields were already white unto the harvest.” For, though not so accessible and familiar as it is now, the Bible had been for centuries universally venerated and recognised in all Christian countries as an infallible authority, not only on faith and morals, but also on cosmogony, Jewish history, and the mission of Christ and his apostles.<sup>1</sup> But obviously the position of the sacred volume during an entirely exceptional period of Protestant organisations is not a broad enough basis for any impartial judgment on the worth of the Bible to the whole world. For the formation of such a judgment, the outlook of the future must be considered as well as the retrospect of the past ; and there are unmistakable signs that even in Protestant countries such authority as the Book may hereafter retain will depend much more on its power to inspire, and much less on the tradition of its miraculous origin, than has ever been the case before. And even as regards past times, the most superficial glance at history shows that during the greater part of the Christian era the imperfections of popular culture, the cost of books, and also the attitude of the Church made absolutely impossible such a position as the Bible has held in the hearts of the Protestant peoples during the last century. Therefore, those who wish to form a reasonable estimate of the worth of the Bible to mankind will beware of the fanaticism engendered by the passionate desire of all sects to find their charter in a miraculous book, so recently made accessible to all. On the other hand, they will be justly impatient of the sciolism which

<sup>1</sup> The only difference on this point between Catholics and Protestants was that the latter insisted on the right of private judgment in every appeal to the authority, while the former held that such appeals must be made through the Church, whose decisions were final.

treats apostles and prophets as though they had been members of a "long-firm," whose frauds have only now been detected. They will set themselves patiently to examine whether the Hebrew and Christian Scriptures are really a miraculous and isolated revelation ; and if not, what is the place they occupy among other literatures and traditions that have influenced the moral progress of mankind.

The remaining chapters of this work are an effort to assist such an examination.

## CHAPTER II

### THE BIBLE IN PROTESTANT AND LOLLARD TIMES

DURING the nineteenth century the Bible may be said to have reached its apotheosis. That is to say, in no previous century was it regarded by such numerous adorers with the awe due to a message from God. For though the Bible—a name to which, in our review of the earliest Christian centuries, we shall have to attach a very elastic and variable significance—had always been treated with reverence as a collection of supernatural books, yet through the Early and Middle Ages it was inaccessible to the vast majority of Christians except as its utterances were doled out to them by the Church. And, as will be seen later, it was not the Bible that made the Church, but the Church that made and guaranteed the Bible. It is true indeed that, with the usual argument in a circle which consecrates so many ecclesiastical positions, the Church appealed to recorded words of Jesus and his apostles for its commission; but the validity of that appeal rested, at least in part, on the judgment of the Church itself as to the authenticity of the Scriptures. Nor did the pretensions of the Church extend only to the decision of questions of authenticity. It claimed the right of authoritative interpretation as



well. To most Christians of the Early and Middle Ages, therefore, the Bible, instead of being the household treasure—we might almost say the household god—which it became in the nineteenth century, was rather a mysterious “palladium,” sanctioning the authority of the priests, who kept it in their holy of holies, and permitted access to it only through themselves.

Now, in treating of Man and the Bible, it must be of interest to trace the gradual process by which the priestly palladium of the earlier centuries became a universal household god in the late century. And this can best be done by telling the story backwards, beginning, in this chapter, with the period since Wycliffe. Afterwards, as a geologist digs his way down through recent and earlier and earliest formations to the unstratified earth-crust out of which all these formations were successively evolved, so we must make our way backward from the emancipation of the Bible by Wycliffe and his successors, through previous ecclesiastical usage and the conditions existing before the invention of printing, to the primitive times when a single gospel or epistle was a priceless treasure, and when the Church was still uncertain which books should be recognised and which disowned as the Word of God.

It is one of the anomalies of public tolerance that the Bible monopoly should have been endured for many years after the British and Foreign Bible Society had become a power in the land. Nay, in an attenuated form that monopoly survives still. For, though anyone may issue the Scriptures with notes or emendations, no one other than the King's printers or the two historic universities may even yet print the Bible text alone, though amended translations or text and commentary may be

issued freely. But at the commencement of the Bible Society's work the monopoly was much more rigid, and, as a result, the text of the Scriptures was much more costly than it is now. Thus, in the first quarter of the nineteenth century such a Bible as can now be purchased for a shilling would cost five or six times as much. At the same time, the economic condition of the vast majority of the population was much less prosperous than after the commercial triumphs signalling the middle and end of that age. So that, previous to the operation of Bible Society charities, the cost of the sacred book made it a luxury rather than an ordinary necessity of the poor man's life. Certainly *The Cottar's Saturday Night* implies the supremacy of the Bible as a household god in certain sections of humble folk even previous to the influence of the Bible Society. But that poetic description refers to Scotland only. And whatever may have been the practice in England of those parts of the population inspired by Methodism or its allied spiritual forces, it is as certain as any social fact of the time can be that neither the peasantry nor the industrial classes in England were in the eighteenth century anything like as familiar with the Book, or as much given to its use in family worship, as were the people of Scotland. For instance, when inquiries were made on behalf of the Bible Society early in its history, it was found that in the Colchester district, out of 1059 families visited, 521 were totally destitute of the Bible ;<sup>1</sup> and amongst 500 vessels trading from Sunderland, only a few had even a single Bible on board. Such facts are suggestive of a state of things very different from that described in the previous chapter. Not that they imply any lack of reverence for

<sup>1</sup> *Story of the Bible Society*, by William Canton, p. 19.

the Bible amongst the multitude who did not possess a copy, but it had for them only a dim and distant sanctity, confirming, indeed, their fears of hell and hopes of heaven, but vividly touching their individual life only on rare occasions, when they heard the lessons read in Church, or were called upon to "kiss the book" in court. Whereas that familiar everyday perusal of its pages, and that freedom to comment thereon, which during the nineteenth century became a whole people's privilege and joy, were necessarily impossible except to those of moderate means, or else of exceptional force of religious faith, such as removes mountains.

In the twentieth century the buying of a small Bible gives the buyer no more thought than the purchase of a magazine or a sixpenny novel for a railway journey. But in the eighteenth century the purchase of a Bible was, amongst all but the rich, an event in family history. The binding and the print were carefully considered, the lowest price was anxiously ascertained; and when the prize was brought home it was exhibited with pride, and assigned a conspicuous place in the middle of the best-parlour table with something of the solemn joy that attended the Ark of the Covenant when brought to its final rest among the chosen people. Then, again, the greater part of the eighteenth century was a period of religious depression, during which the manifestation of anything more than conventional reverence for the Bible was a breach of good manners. Nor was this indifference much disturbed by the sporadic growth of Methodism. For long, and slow, and painful was the progress of the religious revival brought about by the Wesleys and Whitefield, hindered as that movement was by social scorn, episcopal stolidity, and all the petty penalties which

the stupidity of privileged classes could devise. Speaking of that age, Mr Rowland E. Prothero, in his interesting book on *The Psalms in Human Life*, says :—

“Religion grew formal, full of propriety, drowsy, prosperous. Its authority was put forward with cautious regard to the probability of its acceptance. Seeming to distrust itself, it was regarded as something which could be ignored, not as something which imperatively demanded to be either obeyed or condemned. The devotional cast of mind, the enthusiasm, the prophetic vision, the martyr’s passion were left behind in the natural sanctuaries of the mountains. Nothing remained but a religion of the plains—low-lying, level, utilitarian, prosaic.”<sup>1</sup>

While such a Laodicean temper possessed the soul of a people, the Bible could not hold in their hearts the place it achieved in the succeeding century. For the words just quoted suggest that the Book was a theatrical property of Church and State, rather than a treasure of the people. In Scotland, as already acknowledged, the position was somewhat different ; for there the Kirk was, in form at least, democratic, and every household father claimed as good a right as the preaching elder to interpret Scripture. And yet the difference was one of form rather than of substance. For early drill in the Shorter Catechism and Paraphrases, with perhaps later exercises in the Westminster Confession, had strangely reduced a proverbially “hard-headed” race to one dead level of conventional belief, and this belief was imposed by the Kirk. That Kirk might be the Kirk of the people, but the Bible was the Bible of the Kirk.

To these general observations on the relations of the Bible and the people one exception must be made, not

<sup>1</sup> *Op. cit.*, pp. 298-9.



only in Scotland, but in England and all over the Christian world. For the custom of singing the Psalms in public worship gave to the supposed lyrics of King David a special popular vogue in which no other books of the Bible shared. Thus, whereas other parts of the Scriptures were read in public only now and then, according to the order of the Lectionary in the ancient churches and the caprice of pastors in the more modern, the treatment of the Psalms was very different. In England the whole Psalter was sung right through twelve times in each year. And if the Scottish Kirk did not share this privilege, she had her metrical paraphrases continually repeated in school and home, or sung in the Sunday worship, so that they were more impressed on the memory than any other part of the Bible could be. Now, it is undoubtedly true that the "hymn-book of the second Temple" has shown a singular power of adaptability to the most various religious experiences of successive ages and discordant sects ; but, while making full allowance for that, it may be acknowledged that the chief practical reason for the prominence of the Psalms in human life has been their accessibility to the common people, and their impression on individual memory by constant repetition in the home, the school, and the church. This will be more and more apparent as we extend into earlier centuries our survey of the relations of the Bible and Man. Here it is enough to note that, even under the dead formalism of the eighteenth century, the conventional prudery which disdained Methodism distinctly commended the propriety of hearing the Psalms said or sung at least once on a Sunday, and of joining in the quaint doggerel, whether of Sternhold and Hopkins, or of Tate and Brady.



Here we may well pause for a moment to note one lesson already learned on the relations of Man and the Bible. The contrasts presented by the two centuries considered must obviously suggest that the Book without the Prophet is a sealed fountain. There must be a Moses to strike the rock before the waters of life gush forth. For though it is part of my argument that the Bible was comparatively difficult of access until the Bible Society threw wide its pages to mankind, yet even in the dearest times of the eighteenth century it was accorded at least the honours of a fetish, and contradiction of its teachings was a punishable offence, still visited with the sort of stupid cruelty inspired by fear of heaven's wrath. But till Wesley and Whitefield arose it was a dead letter. There was "no breath at all in the midst of it." Indeed, not then only, but throughout Christian history, the experience of the Ethiopian eunuch has been renewed. "Understandest thou what thou readest?" "How can I, except some man should guide me?" There have been indeed exceptional and notable cases in which solitary reading of the Bible has apparently brought about moral salvation. But in almost all such cases the wonder has been wrought by the echo of a mother's or a father's almost forgotten voice, recalled by the solemn words, or else by the pointed expression given by some passage in the Book to the corporate feeling of the better society which the outcast now remembers with remorse; or again by the "confirmation strong" of "holy writ" to the neglected warnings of human experience. And the story of the Bible Society in the main supports what is here said. For though its traditions naturally dwell with affection on such exceptional cases as are here admitted, the obvious and palpable fact is, that where

prophets have abounded, cheap Bibles have done most good. But where there has been no living word, barrenness of result is patent in the religious census of the British empire.

Going back to the seventeenth century, we must not allow the volcanic outburst of Puritan zeal to mislead us as to the average spiritual condition of the common people in those days. Scriptural language may then have larded ordinary speech, both in cottage and palace. But the habit was derived more from public sermons and prayers than from private Bible-reading. For if the Book was too costly in the eighteenth century to be a necessary of household life, much more was it so in the seventeenth. It was an indispensable instrument for the defence of the Gospel, but much too costly to be wielded except by the congregations of the saints. Indeed, tracing backwards from our own times the story of the relations of Man and the Bible, we here first find clear evidence of the dependence of the Book upon ecclesiastical authority. Of course, I do not mean that the Bible ever was or could be dependent on decree or licence of the Church for its power to stir mankind. But undoubtedly, in the absence of Bible Societies and such extra-ecclesiastical agencies, it did more largely than now depend upon the public services of religion for its contact with the common people. Now those services were under ecclesiastical authority of one sort or another, whether priest, presbyter, or preacher, Convocation, Synod, or Assembly of Divines. And it was inevitable that the unlettered multitude should regard the Book as authenticated by the Church, rather than the Church as consecrated by the Book.

Of this attitude of the popular mind we may find a curious illustration in the charge made by both Anglican

and Nonconformist ecclesiasticism against the Quakers, that the latter undervalued the Bible. Now the only justification for this charge was the refusal of George Fox and his true followers to acknowledge the Bible as "the Word of God." The real nature of that refusal is well illustrated by the following extract from Fox's *Journal*, giving his own account of his reason for interrupting a Church service at Nottingham. The incident occurred in 1648, and in that year the Presbyterian order, presumably, prevailed.

"As I went towards Nottingham on a First Day morning, with friends, to a meeting there, when I came on the top of a hill in sight of the town, the Lord said to me, 'Thou must cry against yonder great idol, and against the worshippers therein.' I said nothing of this to the friends, but went with them to the meeting, where the mighty power of the Lord God was amongst us; in which I left friends sitting in the meeting, and went to the steeple-house. When I came there, all the people looked like fallow ground, and the priest,<sup>1</sup> like a great lump of earth, stood in his pulpit above. He took for his text these words of Peter: 'We have also a more sure word of prophecy, whereunto ye do well that ye take heed as unto a light shining in a dark place until the day dawn and the day-star arise in your hearts.' He told the people this<sup>2</sup> was the Scriptures, by which they were to try all doctrines, religions, and opinions. Now the Lord's power was so mighty upon me, and so strong in me, that I could not hold, but was made to cry out, 'Oh! no, it is not the Scriptures,' and told them it was the Holy Spirit by which the holy men of God gave

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<sup>1</sup> The word "priest" does not necessarily imply an Anglican service. For to George, as to Milton, "new presbyter was but old priest writ large."

<sup>2</sup> There is some ambiguity here. Did "*this*" refer to the "word of prophecy" or to the "day-star"? I think the former; for the existence of Scripture was a present fact, not a future hope, and as such the preacher must have treated it.

forth the Scriptures, whereby opinions, religions, and judgments were to be tried ; for it led into all truth, and so gave the knowledge of all truth. The Jews had the Scriptures, yet resisted the Holy Ghost, and rejected Christ, the bright morning-star. They persecuted him and his apostles, and took upon them to try their doctrines by the Scriptures, but erred in judgment, and did not try them right ; because they tried without the Holy Ghost. As I spoke thus amongst them, the officers came, took me away, and put me into a nasty stinking prison, the smell whereof got so into my nose and throat, that it very much annoyed me."

Now it is true that in this extract the phrase "Word of God" does not occur. Nevertheless the whole tenor of it testifies to George Fox's belief in a divine word behind the Scriptures, a word that "spake by the prophets" and bore witness in the hearts of those to whom the prophets spoke. In fact, he looked through the Bible to its source, and declared that source of life and light to be as available for common men of his own day as it had been for prophets before the Gospels or Epistles were written. But he insisted that the insufficiency of the Scriptures without the inward light had been amply proved by the conduct of the Jews, and, he might have added, by that of many Bible Christians in his own day. Why did the rulers of the Church, and, as the context in his *Journal* shows, the common people also, condemn even what was good in his doctrine ? Manifestly because it was unofficial, because it was contrary to the teaching of both priest and presbyter, who declared the Bible to be the "sure word of prophecy." In other words, even in the Puritan seventeenth century, it was the Church that guaranteed the Bible, and not the Bible the Church.



But the greatest official tribute to the Bible during this seventeenth century was the achievement of the Authorised Version, issued in 1611, and especially its dedication to that "most dread sovereign" James I., a document wherein all the virtues of a massive and sonorous English style are desecrated by the arts of an abject flattery, for which even the poor defence of sincerity can scarcely be set up. However, our only concern with it here is to note that it heralds an issue of the Bible by earthly authority, and asserts for the Anglican Church—of course with due submission to its worldly head—the right to determine what is the sincere milk of the Word, as distinguished from adulterations of "Popish Persons at home or abroad" on the one hand, or of "self-conceited Brethren" on the other, "who run their own ways."

As to the sound and lofty English in which that translation is embodied, it is impossible to differ from the unanimous judgment of three hundred years. Or, if any complaint can be made, it is only that from a literary point of view it is too good. For it has so charmed English ears and hearts that any unanimous adoption of a new version, more rigorously representative of what the Hebrew and Hellenistic authors really wrote, is made almost impossible. It is pre-eminently an illustration of the adage, "No man, having drunk old wine, straightway desireth new ; for he saith, The old is better." We must even do as Papias says the early Greek Christians did with the alleged Aramaic Gospel, which "everyone interpreted as he could." By the aid of our "Holy Bible with Twenty Thousand Emendations," the Revised Version, the unhappily incomplete "Polychrome Bible," and other such efforts, we may remind ourselves that the Authorised Version is not infallible. But as to setting



it aside—we might as well talk of setting aside Magna Charta.

This great version however, was, of course, far from being original. For while the learned men, who, by a division of labour, produced it in some four years, were as well qualified as the scholarship of the time allowed, to interpret the Hebrew and Greek originals, they had also before them the previous versions of Wycliffe, Tyndale, and Coverdale, revised and re-revised by Cranmer and William Whittingham, who, with the co-operation of Geneva refugees in the days of Mary I., produced “the Geneva Bible” in 1557, the first English translation issued in Roman letters and divided into verses. Then also in 1568 Archbishop Parker, with the assistance of fifteen scholars, of whom eight were Bishops, produced another revision which a nation less scrupulous about the Bible might have been content to accept as final. But the Hampton Court Conference was not satisfied; and the British Solomon was induced, not very willingly at first, it would appear, to appoint a large Commission of fifty-four<sup>1</sup> members to achieve, as the dedication says, “one more exact translation of the Holy Scriptures into the English tongue.” But, like wise men, they were content to adopt the work of their predecessors so far as they judged it faithful to the original languages. For their method of procedure was, they tell us—or rather told the earthly head of the Church—to elicit the meaning “out of the Original Sacred Tongues, together with comparing the labours both in our own and other foreign languages of many worthy men who went before us.” And though genius is not usually attributed to book-worms, those translators had at least this in common with Shakespeare,

<sup>1</sup> Only forty-seven actually took part in the work.

that where they borrowed other people's work, they transmuted silver into gold. For the writers of the sumptuous though unctuous English of the dedication were quite incapable of breaking the teeth of readers with gravel, or marring old rhythms for the sake of trivial amendments.

Our *Authorised* Version was the first *authoritative* translation of the whole Bible into any modern vernacular tongue. It was made "by his Majesty's special command." It was "appointed to be read in churches." And to this day nothing but an Act of Parliament would make it legal to substitute the Revised Version for the Authorised in reading the "Lessons" which form part of the morning and evening service. With this exceptionally fortunate result of Tudor and Stuart legislation we shall not quarrel. But the point to be noted here is the conspicuous illustration given of the relations of the Church to the Bible. For even if it had been possible in the seventeenth century to separate things ecclesiastical from things political, things sacred from things secular, it was King James as "sacred Majesty," King James as head of the Anglican Church, King James, moved thereto by the Hampton Court clergy, who watched over and approved and authorised the translation of the Word of God and "appointed it to be read in churches." In this concurrence or rather merging of ecclesiastical in royal authority many good people recognised a fulfilment of the prophecy, "Kings shall be thy nursing fathers." But it is of more importance to us to note that it was rather a critical step in the gradual emancipation of the State from the Church, which had been first inauspiciously begun by the unholy hands of Henry VIII.

It is true that during the century which included the

ill-omened reign of the latter monarch, the first official attempts were made to give all English people access to the whole Bible in their own language. But it cannot for a moment be supposed that the successive versions already enumerated could possibly have done for the multitude the work of the modern Bible Society in making the Scriptures "familiar in their mouths as household words." For, in the first place, a very large part of the population, probably the majority, could not read. And in the next place, the cost of the Book must have put it out of the reach of the labouring classes, who then, as always, were enormously preponderant in numbers.<sup>1</sup> Yet it is obvious from innumerable allusions, scattered through the great literature of the century, that not only readers of books, but the humblest hearers of stage plays were presumed to be at least so far acquainted with Bible narratives and doctrines as to follow easily an imperfect citation or a passing reference. Still the popular knowledge implied must, for the two reasons already given—cost of the Book, and the widespread inability to read—have been very much more limited than in the age of Bible Societies and Sunday Schools. Nor was it possible that the scanty means then existing for the education of children could store the memory with Bible lore in early days. On a point like this we may easily be misled by the educational enthusiasm aroused partly by the revival of

<sup>1</sup> In his *Economic Interpretation of History*, the late Professor Thorold Rogers describes the condition of the people during the sixteenth century as continually going from bad to worse. Neither the miserly craft of Henry VII., nor his son's plunder of the monasteries, nor the wild extravagance of the latter, had any effect in bettering the lot of the labouring multitude. "When Elizabeth came to the throne both sovereign and people were miserably poor. The base money had driven the working classes to beggary, etc." (*op. cit.*, p. 37). In such a state of things Bibles were necessarily a luxury of the rich.

letters and partly by the Reformation. For in England at least—though Scotland, incited by John Knox, pursued a more democratic policy—the new Grammar Schools were limited in their range of influence, and though originally intended for the poor, soon became the prey of the rich.

In fine, it was not by any movement of systematic national education that popular knowledge of the Bible was increased during the sixteenth century, but by the response of religious leaders to the revival of the people's hunger for the Word of God. I say the revival, for the spirit of Lollardism was only apparently dead. And when once the quarrel of Henry VIII. with the Pope incidentally opened the ports to Tyndale's Bible, the good seed fell on prepared ground. For though the first edition of that great work was bought up and burned by ecclesiastical authority in Antwerp, it had been available during three years for pious smugglers before that fate befell it in 1529. And before the martyrdom of its heroic author in 1536, some ten or twelve new editions had been issued. It is matter of history that this version of Tyndale's attracted very keen interest. There is probably no exaggeration in the description given by an old writer who declares that this interest was by no means confined to "the learned, and those that were noted as lovers of the Reformation," but was general "all England over, among all the vulgar and common people." "With what greediness the Word of God was read, and what resort to places where the reading of it was ! Everybody that could bought the Book, or busily read it, or got others to read it if they could not themselves ; and divers more elderly people learned (to read) on purpose ; and even little boys flocked among the rest to hear portions of the Holy Scriptures read."



This is just what might naturally be expected in a country where, in the ashes of Lollardism, many sparks of its fire remained, in an age when all Europe watched with passionate interest the progress of the Lutheran revolt from the Pope, and in a time when there were scarcely any books available for the people, and absolutely not one to vie with an English Bible in its appeal to the deepest springs of hope, joy, and fear in the common man. Still, the words quoted above sufficiently indicate how much more limited was popular access to the Bible than it is in our own day. It was more by hearing than by reading for themselves that the vast majority became acquainted with the Book. Before King Henry had advanced so far as to authorise, though not to compel, the ecclesiastical use of Coverdale's revision of Tyndale, meetings or conventicles for the purpose of Bible-reading were at least connived at by Bishops and magistrates. And when at length the open Bible took its place in the public services of the Church, it was regarded as the chief boon of the reformed religion. It is true that Henry VIII., though worldly wise enough to use a subservient Parliament as his tool, gave his people the Bible, as he gave or took from them everything else, with a matter-of-course assumption of the embodiment of all power, whether temporal or spiritual, in himself. But though he might hand the Book to Cranmer, the people did not receive it from the king; they received it from the Church, and were henceforward mainly indebted to the Church for their knowledge of the Word.

A somewhat pathetic illustration of the difficulties which countless poor people must have experienced at that time in obtaining the Scriptures for themselves, is afforded by the institution of chained Bibles, of which



relics have been from time to time reported in our own days. Thus in the year 1855 the *Times* newspaper reported the replacing in Canterbury Cathedral of a great Bible that had certainly once been chained on a reading-desk to which the public would appear to have had access. The particular book is said to be a second edition of Cranmer's Bible, and dated 1572. It was almost certainly placed in position immediately on publication. Various other chained Bibles have been reported during the last twenty years by correspondents of *Notes and Queries*,<sup>1</sup> but it is sufficient for my purpose to note the custom and its implications. For plainly, if Bibles had been even half as plentiful as they are now, no one would have thought of putting up chained Bibles. Nor can we altogether avoid the painful reflection that neither the sacredness of the Book nor the sanctity of the place could make chain and lock needless for safety. Yet in modern times visitors and even loungers of all classes stray about our magnificent cathedrals, where often volumes of no small value lie on reading-desks or stalls apparently unguarded. Perhaps there may be very exceptional cases of attempted theft, though one does not see them reported, and indeed they must be so rare that no one expects them. What is the reason of this difference between our generation and that of the chained Bibles? Is it that the open Bible

<sup>1</sup> The Bible was not the only book treated in this fashion, for a correspondent writing to *Notes and Queries* (7th series), Nov. 27, 1886, reports a little library of chained books in the Lady Chapel of Wootton Wawen Parish Church, Warwickshire. In fact, it was an ancient "free library" for the parishioners, though, of course, it was limited to religious literature. It is curious to note that Calvin's *Institutes* in English is mentioned amongst the collection. There is also a well-known chained library, still preserved, in Wimborne Minster. It has survived many changes, but the arrangement of the books and of the chains is almost certainly what it was of old.

has made us so much more honest? One would like to think so if the police reports would allow us. Or is it that a great Bible in the former age commanded so high a price that it was well worth stealing? The contemptible and villainous thefts of rare illustrations or other precious pages from priceless books in the British Museum and other great libraries unfortunately sway the balance towards the latter view.

But, returning to our proper subject, I observe once more that our information about the Bible in the sixteenth century clearly suggests that amongst the vast majority of the population such knowledge of the Scriptures as they possessed came by hearing rather than by reading. This is the impression made upon me by the sort of Bible knowledge expected by Shakespeare in the hearers of his plays. That he was himself at least as well versed in sacred story as in translations of Plutarch there is no reason whatever to doubt. Born at the beginning of Elizabeth's reign, amid the echoes of the Coverdale-Tyndale Bible, he grew up under the predominance of the Cranmer and Geneva Bibles, and during the last five years of his life must have heard our familiar Authorised Version read in Stratford-on-Avon Church. The word "Bible," however, does not once occur in his plays or poems.<sup>1</sup> And this not at all because he thought allusion to anything so sacred to be inappropriate in a playwright or poet of love, for in *Othello* he puts into the foul mouth of Iago the words :

"Trifles light as air  
Are to the jealous confirmation strong  
As proofs of holy writ."

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<sup>1</sup> One's own observation is confirmed by the Concordance of Mary Cowden Clarke.

And in the *Merchant of Venice*, Antonio, after Shylock's gloating recital of Jacob's sharp practice in the sheep-folds, observes impatiently :

"Mark you this, Bassanio ;  
The devil can cite Scripture for his purpose.  
An evil soul producing holy witness  
Is like a villain with a smiling cheek ;  
A goodly apple rotten at the heart.  
O what a goodly outside falsehood hath !"

Now to the modern Bible reader there does not seem to be in the story of Jacob's sheep dealings any such manifest sanctity as to justify the almost passionate repugnance of Antonio to hearing it quoted by a money-lending Jew. But then it belonged to "holy writ," which was in the mind of the poet and his contemporaries sanctified, not so much by personal or domestic reading, as by the solemnities of public worship, or, in other words, by the authority of the Church.

As a worshipper at Stratford-on-Avon and in London, Shakespeare had witnessed more rapid alternations of outward ritual than any preceding generation had ever seen. But both Catholic and Protestant ecclesiastics had, through all such changes, upheld the traditional awe which hallowed the Bible as the very voice of God. For if it be said, as we shall presently have to admit, that when Papal Rome had sway, the Bible—with certain exceptions—was withheld from the laity, the answer is that this was not from any want of reverence for the Word, but rather from excess of reverence corrupted to idolatry, the same sort of fetishistic superstition, in fact, which in the Mass withheld the cup from laymen, because it was too divine a thing to be touched except by consecrated lips.

Now, though early Protestants were not generally aware of it, the Lutheran, Zwinglian, and Calvinistic waves of popular impulse were generated to a considerable extent by a humanistic feeling which, though it was hardly yet an "enthusiasm of humanity," began to be impatient of mere priestcraft. The ultimate developments of this humanism were, of course, far out of sight, and inconceivable—as, indeed, they are even yet to the majority of Christians. Meanwhile, the same humanistic feeling which gave the cup to the laity unveiled to them also the Bible.

But this humanistic feeling worked through the Reformed Church; and the newly granted laymen's privilege of access to the Bible was enjoyed mainly in the Church services. Thus "holy writ" was a sacred deposit, entrusted of old to the Church, but now in the latter days communicated by her to the whole people of Christ. Accordingly the references of Shakespeare to the Bible suggest much more an oral acquaintance with it than the personal intimacy apparent in *The Cottar's Saturday Night*.<sup>1</sup> The grave-digger in *Hamlet*, arguing with his mate about Adam, as "the first that ever bore arms," exclaims "What! art a heathen? How dost thou understand the Scripture? The Scripture says

<sup>1</sup> "As a rule his (Shakespeare's) use of scriptural phraseology, as of scriptural history, suggests youthful reminiscence and the assimilative tendency of the mind in an early stage of development, rather than close and continuous study of the Bible in adult life" (*A Life of William Shakespeare*, by Sidney Lee, 2nd ed., p. 17). The Right Reverend Charles Wordsworth, Bishop of St Andrews, in his work on *Shakspeare's Knowledge and Use of the Bible*, was too anxious to make the poet a devout son of the Church. Most of the Bishop's quotations, though, of course, with noble exceptions, are of a piece with what he solemnly gives us from Jaques, in *As You Like It*, "I'll go sleep if I can; and if I cannot, I'll rail against all the first-born of Egypt."



Adam digged: could he dig without arms?" Now this is a purely inferential interpretation of the sacred text. For there is nothing in Genesis about Adam "digging." It is written that he was put in the garden "to dress and to keep it," and it may safely be inferred from this that he "digged." But this is just such an inferential interpretation as might naturally occur to uncultivated hearers of the Word, who were not much in the habit of reading it with their own eyes. Indeed, one cannot help thinking that the honest grave-digger was mingling with holy writ a rhyme much older than his day:

"Whan Adam dalfe and Eve spane,  
Whare was than the pride of man?"<sup>1</sup>

Nor does it seem that any scriptural references made by the great poet are more suggestive of private reading than of public hearing. The sacred name "Jesus" occurs only once with the final s. Ordinarily it appears as "Jesu," and once as "Jesu Maria." This latter recurrence to Catholic usage may very well have been suggested by the historic sense in which Shakespeare was not wanting, notwithstanding his violent anachronisms. At the same time, it is noteworthy that in the latest days of Elizabeth it was considered safe to introduce a distinctly Roman Catholic title of Christ. But a considerable proportion of the first hearers of *Romeo and Juliet* had, no doubt, in their earliest days used this form in their personal devotions while hearing Mass under Mary. And the same may be said of the constant preference of the vocative form "Jesu" rather than "Jesus." It was the

<sup>1</sup> Quoted in the *New English Dictionary*, s.v. "Delve," from a MS. assigned to A.D. 1340. The more modern form of the couplet changes the strong preterite "dalfe" to the weak form "delled," and for the second line substitutes "Who was then the gentleman?"



form habitually used in the services of the ancient Church, and it was perhaps not very easily displaced in the prayers of the people. One other allusion is still more suggestive of the constancy with which the Church services were in the mind of the poet. The unfortunate King Richard II., at the moment before resigning his crown to Bolingbroke, cries :

“God save the King ! Will no man say Amen ?  
Am I both priest and clerk ?<sup>1</sup> Well then, amen.”

On the whole, then, we may fairly conclude that Shakespeare's references to holy writ imply a Bible-hearing rather than a Bible-reading generation. For while causes mentioned above made any universal possession of the Scriptures impossible, all were, by law, compelled to attend their parish church.

But even granting that during the sixteenth century English knowledge of the Bible was chiefly oral and derived through Church services, our ancestors of that age were, in this respect, very much better off than the vast majority of their Continental fellow-Christians. For the Reformation movement in France, Italy, Switzerland, and even in Germany, can scarcely be said to have ever laid hold of the soul of a people with such thoroughness of penetration as it did in England and Scotland. The Germans, of course, have as keen a sentiment about religious ideals as they have about poetry or patriotism. But the Reformation did not turn every earnest believer into a theologian as it did in Britain ; nor did it beget

<sup>1</sup> There is no anachronism here. We are not to think of the eighteenth-century clerk on the lowest stage of a “three-decker.” Responses were necessary in many Catholic services, where a responding congregation could not be relied on. Such responses were repeated by a “clerk,” who might have other duties as well.

that love for doctrinal controversy, as a joy in itself, so characteristic of the Puritan and Presbyterian temper at home. So that Luther's vigorous version, roughly speaking contemporary with Tyndale's, did not find a middle class and peasantry so eager for weapons of theological strife as did the latter. For it should not be forgotten that, while earlier German translations of the Bible had been made, none of them had anything like the power over the people at large which was wielded by Wycliffe's version, or Wycliffe's poor preachers.

The interest excited in recent times among the religious public of England by pre-Reformation literature, by the sermons of Tauler<sup>1</sup> and the story of the Mystics, and "the Friends of God," has led to an exaggerated idea of the extent to which the masses of the people in Europe before the Reformation were leavened with religious feeling in the form of individual conviction or aspiration. But surely the congregations that thronged to hear Tauler preach, vast though they might appear to his enthusiastic disciples, could not constitute one-thousandth part of the population of Central Europe. And the intense earnestness of aspiration, combined with an approximation—though only an approximation—to pantheistic insight, in the *Theologica Germanica*,<sup>2</sup> suggests the existence of

<sup>1</sup> It is surely noteworthy that in the *Golden A B C*, which Tauler's instructor gave him to study, the only reference, if such it can be called, to Scripture, is "Christ our Blessed Lord's life and death shall ye follow, and wholly conform yourself thereunto with all your might." But this may obviously have referred to the tradition of the Church, together with the gospel readings in the Mass. Imagine a modern Protestant teacher giving to a disciple a religious "Alphabet" in which there should have been no reference, other than these doubtful words, to the diligent study of the Bible!

<sup>2</sup> The best opinions seem to be strongly against the attribution of that remarkable book to Tauler.

small coteries of esoteric believers rather than any comprehensive wave of popular zeal. And though of course Luther's version of the Bible, when it afterwards appeared, was eagerly sought after by all anti-papal men and women who could read, these could not be anything like a majority of the German population. Indeed, certain terrible features of the Anabaptist uprising and the Peasant Revolt show that political and social wrongs, much more than any religious convictions, were the cause of those horrors. Whatever view may be taken of the political aims of the British Puritans, the tendency of impartial scholarly opinion, conspicuously represented by the late Dr S. R. Gardiner, has been toward a favourable judgment on the moral tone of the Cromwellian armies, and their moderation in the use of the laws of war then prevalent.<sup>1</sup> But it is questionable whether Oliver could in any Continental country have recruited 20,000 or 30,000 men who, in his sense of the words, "had the fear of God before them, and made some conscience of what they did." Certainly it would have been impossible anywhere but in Britain to collect a warrior host of whom every man was as ready to expound the Bible in his left hand as to wield the sword in his right.

It is scarcely probable that in the nineteenth century the Bible was less widely distributed among the people of Europe than in the fifteenth, sixteenth, or seventeenth centuries. But on inquiry being made by the British and Foreign Bible Society, early in the course of its operations, the dearth of Bibles on the Continent was considered appalling. Thus it was found that in Lithuania, 18,000 German families were without a Bible, as also 7800 Polish

<sup>1</sup> The slaughter at Wexford and Drogheda was exceptional, and evidently haunted Cromwell's conscience.

and 7000 Lithuanian families. One-half of the population of Holland was said to be without the Scriptures. In the district of Dorpat (Esthonia) containing 106,000 inhabitants, not 200 Testaments were to be found : and there were Christian pastors who, content with their knowledge of the original, did not possess the Bible in the vernacular which they used in preaching.<sup>1</sup> If this was the case in the nineteenth century, what must have been the scarcity in the sixteenth !

The Bible carried through the streets of Münster before John Bockholdt, the insane claimant to the throne of David, was merely a fetish, from which people driven mad by oppression expected the same sort of salvation as the African savage expects from his blood-smeared idol. Matthias, a fanatic of heroic mould, knew the story of Gideon, and lost his life apparently through his confidence that a renewal of the exploit related therein only required sufficient faith. But it is doubtful whether he or Bockholdt could read ; and the probability is that the parts of Scripture which they subjected to such amazing misconstruction, were known to them only orally through the readings in their religious services—if such the ceremonies can be called which so rapidly degenerated into orgies. While as to the wild multitudes who poured into Münster with the idea that the kingdom of heaven was at hand, their knowledge must have been confined to mere catchwords and phrases that had been transformed into the incantations of diseased brains.

Perhaps it may be said with some justice that this

<sup>1</sup> See *Encyclo. Brit.*, 9th edition, *s.v.* "Bible." I have reason to believe that the particulars above quoted were confirmed by the Society.



sudden madness was a Nemesis on the obscurantist policy of the Catholic Church of the Middle Ages, in withholding from the multitude a Book that stored up the spiritual experience of ages ; which counselled patience, and rebuked all rash anticipations of God's purpose. "Woe unto them . . . that say, Let him make speed and hasten his work, that we may see it ; and let the counsel of the Holy One of Israel draw nigh and come, that we may know it !" The benevolent advocates of the Bible for the people have been perfectly justified in claiming for the Book a power of inspiring common men with moral ideals. But it is always implied that the attainment of those ideals is subject to a divine order, and that "patience" must "have her perfect work." Nor does it require any belief in the supernatural origin of the Bible to justify the opinion that the comparative order and moderation of the Puritan revolution in England was owing, at least in some measure, to the fact that, whether by hearing or by reading, a larger proportion of the population was familiar with the Scriptures than could be the case elsewhere. Yet, as already remarked, the veto of the Catholic Church upon the free use of the Bible by the laity originated not in any ecclesiastical irreverence for "God's word written," but much more in an exaggerated and superstitious awe. For that Word was held to be too holy and divine a thing to be handled by the profane mob. It is indeed possible, or even probable, that this superstitious awe was intensified by experience of the heretical tendencies of Bible readers. But ecclesiastics anxious for the purity of the faith might plead scriptural precedent for caution in entrusting to the "unlearned and unstable" a Book that contained things "hard to be understood"



and liable to be wrested to the destruction of the readers.<sup>1</sup>

This was the attitude of the Church in the Middle Ages toward the Bible and the people ; and there is no more conspicuous proof of the courage and faith of Wycliffe and his followers than the daring with which they confronted this ban. Their perils are best understood by some frank confessions of the more timid among them. "Brother," wrote one such in answer to a request for a plainer exposition of God's word to the simple, "I knowe wel that I am holde(n) by Cryste's lawe to performe thyn axinge, bote notheless we beth<sup>2</sup> now so far yfallen away from Criste's lawe, that if I wolde answere to thyn axingus<sup>3</sup> I moste in cas vnderfonge the deth<sup>4</sup> ; and thu wost<sup>5</sup> wel that a man is yholden<sup>6</sup> to kepe his lyf as longe as he may. And perawnter<sup>7</sup> it is spedful<sup>8</sup> to holden oure pes<sup>9</sup> awhile, tyl that God foucheth saf<sup>10</sup> that his wille be yknowe."<sup>11</sup>

Under such circumstances, nothing but the imperious voice of God within the soul could inspire mortal man to confront falsehood incarnated in worldly power. Now in the fourteenth century this inspiration was felt more keenly in England than in any other part of Christendom. On the continent of Europe, indeed, there were reformers before the Reformation, and their devotional utterances, their aspirations, and even their mystical speculations,

<sup>1</sup> 2 Peter iii. 16. By the Council of Toulouse (1229) "no layman was permitted to have any book of the Old or New Testament, especially in a translation, unless perhaps a Psalter" (Milman's *Latin Christianity*, iv., p. 239).

<sup>2</sup> Are.

<sup>3</sup> Askings.

<sup>4</sup> I must run the risk of death.

<sup>5</sup> Wottest, knowest.

<sup>6</sup> Bound.

<sup>7</sup> Peradventure.

<sup>8</sup> Expedient.

<sup>9</sup> Peace.

<sup>10</sup> Vouchsafeth.

<sup>11</sup> Quoted by Forshall and Madden in their preface to Wycliffe's Bible, p. xv.

have profound interest. But the practical moral power that shakes spiritual wickedness in high places, was at that time realised most conspicuously by Wycliffe and his preachers to the poor. What, then, was the occasion of this distinction? The inevitable answer is that here were brought most obviously and closely into co-operation the open Bible and the prophetic voice.

Yet such an explanation does not in the least assume that miracle or revelation triumphed over natural law. And a right understanding of what really did occur is of much importance to a just appreciation of the true relations between man and the Bible. The Church at that time had fallen into a condition of moral degradation scarcely to be paralleled even in the clouded history of her past. For so far was she then from representing and maintaining the spiritual or moral ideals of the Gospels and the ethical exhortations in the Epistles, that she suspected, rebuked, and punished every slightest movement among priesthood or laity toward a higher life than that of passive obedience and correct ceremonial. Whence, then, did Wycliffe and his followers derive the light and the power which made them pioneers—I will not say of Luther and Calvin, but rather—of the spiritual emancipation dawning now? Surely they were stimulated to a larger faith by the amazing contrast between the words of the Lord Jesus as interpreted by the ethics of St Paul, and, on the other hand, the worldly wisdom of the Church.

Of course we are not to forget the subsidiary causes which helped the purely moral revolt. For bitter political discontent was caused by the greed of Rome, and by the alienation of national resources to private advantage, an alienation so grandly denounced in death by

Shakespeare's John of Gaunt. But this only gave the opportunity to the prophet, and could not kindle his sacred fire. The terrible gloom of the Black Death, which seemed to herald the Judgment Day, must indeed have brought the people face to face with "the powers of the world to come." But unvarying experience proves that such horrors drive men only to more assiduous fetishism. They do not, except in rare instances of solitary souls, already enlightened, awaken men to higher thoughts of destiny and God. Whatever, then, may have been the effect of that horrible pestilence upon Wycliffe,<sup>1</sup> who was still a youth when the plague swept away nearly half the people of the land, it was, in itself, much more likely to drive men into the arms of heaven's alleged vicegerents, than to awaken them to a more spiritual faith.<sup>2</sup> Still, the rebellion of the Barons against the exactions of the Papacy, and the moral degradation of the Church, did offer to a man like Wycliffe a favourable opportunity for turning the resentment of the people to the exaltation of their spiritual life. His popularisation of the New Testament, and his direct appeal to it, had three beneficial effects. First, it showed that the exaggerated ceremonial and hierarchical pretensions of the contemporary Church had no justification in the primitive Church records. Secondly, it awakened the unlearned to the fact that Jesus and his Apostles taught the immediate sovereignty of God over each soul, without any intervention of the priest. And finally, it displayed to the conscience a religious morality, not only inconsistent, but totally

<sup>1</sup> Forshall and Madden suggest the plague as a reason why Wycliffe's first effort to popularise Scripture dealt with the Book of Revelation.

<sup>2</sup> The recent earthquake in Sicily affords a painful confirmation of the above. For, according to eye-witnesses, the influence of unreasoning terror has driven the poor survivors to renewed zeal for superstitious rites.

incommensurable, with the example and teachings of the Church.

Herein, surely, lay an immense difference between the proposed, but unaccomplished, reforms of Wycliffe and the inferior, though realised, work of Luther. For the controversial athlete of Erfurt concentrated almost all his dogged force on the rescue and maintenance of one Pauline doctrine, justification by faith, while he was blind to the incongruity with spiritual religion of a fetishistic interpretation of the Lord's Supper.<sup>1</sup> Thus, "*hoc est corpus meum*" was, to him, a fixed bound, not less impassable to his thought than the angles of the pentagram to Mephistopheles. Very different was the position of Wycliffe, though the difference is manifest in spirit, temper, and outlook rather than in creed. His open and express repudiation of the physical miracle supposed to be wrought in every Mass, was indeed a significant divergence as well from the obstinate opinion of Luther as from contemporary belief. Otherwise the opinions of Wycliffe on the supremacy of Scripture and the conditions of salvation agreed generally with the Lutheran creed of the future. But though Wycliffe followed St Paul in teaching the value of faith, he certainly did not give to the doctrine of justification by faith alone the disproportionate place afterwards assigned to it. His sense of the value of the Bible seems to have been both wider and more spiritual than that of the German reformer. For it was not to him a repertory of magic spells insuring deliverance from Satan or hell, it was rather a fountain of living water distinguished from all

<sup>1</sup> I do not forget the innumerable names of real saints that may be arrayed against this observation. But it was not the only remnant of fetishism which they transmuted by the glamour of unreasoning faith,



the broken cisterns of secular lore by its refreshing and inspiring power.

If we could but realise for ourselves the mental and spiritual condition of the nameless multitude in that gloomy age, their oppressions by Crown and Church, their life of earthly terror and dread of coming judgment, their intellectual destitution, their squalid lives, relieved only by occasional echoes of heaven in the Church services,—we should be able to understand how Wycliffe's tracts and his English New Testament, illumined by the fervour of his preachers, awoke in them visions of a new world.

Langland's *Piers Plowman* had already stirred them. Chaucer was in his prime ; and his merry lines about pardoners and abbots were, no doubt, recited by the few who could read to the many who could not. So, when blessings on the poor, and on the hunger for right and on love and brotherhood fell in full melody of English words from the pages of the New Testament on the ears strained to hear the Sovereign of the soul, the common people, as of old, heard gladly. For those words were felt to have an authority dependent on neither priest nor king.

How far the Miracle plays of the fourteenth and perhaps the thirteenth centuries may have helped the work of Wycliffe by familiarising an unschooled multitude with at least the chief events of Bible story, it is difficult to judge. At least they were popular, and were performed by travelling players, for whose arrival each town or village was prepared by such rude modes of advertisement as were then in vogue. "The intended exhibition," says Edward Clodd, in a series of papers showing much research,<sup>1</sup> "was announced by proclamation

<sup>1</sup> Printed in *Knowledge*, 1885.



or *bane*—a word retained in our ‘marriage banns’—made by three heralds with sound of trumpet.” The authors of the homely doggerel which formed the text of these plays were not at any pains to quote or adapt the very words of Scripture, though here and there, of course, a phrase or two was made available. Of possible edification little can be said; for, obviously, the main purpose was amusement. Wycliffe complained that the Devil was the most popular impersonation,<sup>1</sup> and occasionally some of the plays degenerated into downright buffoonery. But for all that, it is likely enough that these Miracle plays helped to familiarise the untaught many with Scripture story, and to form that Bible habit of which Wycliffe and succeeding popular teachers availed themselves in their efforts to teach higher truth.

<sup>1</sup> It is noteworthy that on a grander scale, and in purer forms of imagination, the same thing remains true, as in *Paradise Lost* and *Faust*.

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The absence of any reference to the work of Dr James Gairdner, C.B., on *Lollardy and the Reformation in England*, is explained by the fact that the whole of my book was written, and the greater part printed, before I had the advantage of consulting that scholarly and instructive treatise. If I had seen Dr Gairdner's book soon enough I should have discussed some of the points he raises. But I cannot say that I should have made any alterations of consequence. His criticisms of the inaccuracies of Foxe, the Martyrologist, appear to be well grounded. But they are such as to be quite consistent with Dr Gairdner's own generous acknowledgment of that enthusiast's sincerity. Though the learned writer seems disposed in some of his pages to minimise the effect of the Lollard tradition in the English Reformation, I am quite satisfied with the paragraph on p. 328 (Book II. chap. ii.), where the revival of Lollardy by the publication of Tyndale's New Testament is acknowledged. I need scarcely add that I cannot attach to Church law and order the predominant importance which this distinguished writer does.

## CHAPTER III

### THE BIBLE IN THE LATER MIDDLE AGE

WHEN in our backward survey we reach the thirteenth century, we enter on the age of the preaching friars, whose novel methods were evoked by the alarming spread of heresy over the south of France, and across the Alps, in an audacious advance toward Rome itself. For nearly 900 years—ever since the imperial decree subjecting Hilarius, Archbishop of Arles, to the spiritual supremacy of Rome—the Gallic provinces out of which modern France was gradually evolved had, notwithstanding some efforts to assert a national Christianity, generally acknowledged the claim of the Popes to inherit the supposed primacy of St Peter. The adhesion of the Franks under Clovis to the Catholic Church ensured the expulsion of Arianism from the region of their conquests, and gave to orthodoxy in the future France a preponderance which was, on the whole, steadfastly maintained until the Revolution. But one of the incidental results of the Crusades, a freer intercourse between East and West, had introduced into Southern France and Savoy many survivors of a persecuted sect originally domiciled on the borders of Armenia, but afterwards transferred by imperial policy to Bulgaria, whence they found their way to Western lands.

This sect was that of the Paulicians, of whom Gibbon in his great history gives a rapid but vivid sketch. The substantial accuracy of that sketch has been generally acknowledged by competent judges in more recent times. My purpose, however, does not require me to repeat that story at any length, but only to note such incidents as illustrate the relations of Man and the Bible at certain crises in the history of the sect. Thus I postpone until our retrospect reaches the ninth century, such slight examination as space permits of Gibbon's authorities, and must content myself here with premising my conviction that the Albigenses and Waldenses who, in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries appealed from Rome to the New Testament, were the spiritual successors of the Paulicians. The latter, at the time of their origin, appear to have possessed only a part of the sacred books. But their appeal from the Church of their day was practically the same. It is also noteworthy that both the older and the later sect were stigmatised by their opponents as Manichæans.<sup>1</sup>

A discussion of Manichæism scarcely comes within the scope of this work, but I should fail to interest readers whom I am very anxious to reach if I did not give here some explanation of the term. The foolish zeal of the orthodox in the destruction of heretical books has left the origin of the sect in much obscurity. It is difficult to believe that the name Mane, from which it is derived, ever belonged to an individual man. It is certainly of Persian origin, and probably akin to the word "Mene," or rather "Mane," in the writing on the wall of Belshazzar's palace. True, the first syllable had only a semi-vowel in the Aramaic text; but in the Septuagint and in other Greek renderings it is *μανη*. The root significance seems to be "number" or "measurement" or "enumeration." I can conceive that the name might be very naturally applied to a school of mystic philosophy, derived from the Magians, and brooding in obscurity, until after the Christian era it attached itself like a foreign parasite to a spiritual organism which could never have given it birth. The main principle of Manichæism was akin to, though not identical with, the doctrine of Zoroaster concerning light and darkness. These two opposing

The name Albigenses, by which the French anti-sacerdotalists of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries are generally distinguished, is of territorial origin.<sup>1</sup> For the district around Alby (or Albi) had once been known as the Albigenian region, and with this country they were popularly associated. But in other districts and in Savoy they were known by several other names, such as Cathari (Puritans), Paterini (a name of uncertain meaning), Tisserands (as being of the working class and largely weavers); in later times, Vaudois (from the place of their refuge). The religious movement of the Waldenses in the latter part of the twelfth century was apparently continuous with that of the Albigenses, though the name was derived from a personal leader. From a survey of the whole facts, it seems the most obvious conclusion

powers were alike eternal. All matter belonged to the kingdom of darkness. The power of light was the spiritual god who could not come into contact with matter. By some obscure complications, which one need not even try to understand, the realm of darkness encroached on the realm of light. Hence all the miseries of human history. There could be no salvation but by complete emancipation from matter. When Manichæism affixed itself to Christianity, it inevitably mutilated the Apostolic Creed. Thus it relegated the Old Testament dispensation to the realm of darkness, and to the "Demiurgus," by whose inspiration the bloody sacrifices, crimes, and massacres of old Jewish times were caused. The divine Father of Jesus was the spiritual God of the realm of light. But the Christ, the Word, the Emanation from the spiritual God, was never contaminated by a "virgin birth" or union with flesh and blood. Nevertheless the human Jesus served to manifest the Word or Emanation. But only those followed him truly who sought emancipation from matter, who abstained from marriage, and who practised certain other doctrines of asceticism. The orthodox accusations of entirely opposite practices may be true, or partly true. We cannot tell. But the above is the general theory of Manichæism, as far as it can be gathered from a welter of obscurities and contradictions.

<sup>1</sup> The opinion of Mosheim, that the name is derived from the *Council* of Alby, held for the purpose of condemning them, can hardly be sustained even by his authority. Can we imagine the Hussites being called Constantians from the Council of Constance?



that all these names were attached to different phases or different local manifestations of the same spiritual rebellion against hierarchical authority in favour of recurrence to a more primitive tradition, or, where possible, to the actual recorded words of Jesus and his first disciples. Nor should I be at all inclined to dispute the theory that these protesters against sacerdotalism were in various degrees, at some crises, moved by an awful sense of direct personal access to the one eternal source of inspiration in the very life of God. Of this consciousness various explanations may be given by different schools of thought. But that it was real to the persons affected, and often productive of unselfish devotion and fruitful heroism, there can be no doubt.<sup>1</sup>

Out of all these forms of one movement I select the Waldenses for brief attention, because their story illustrates best the place of the Bible in such spiritual uprisings. In their case only are we allowed to know any particulars as to the modes in which ignorant and unlearned men "obtained access to the Scriptures which the Church was now guarding with the jealousy of fear." But about the origin of the special Waldensian movement our information seems good. Peter Waldo, a rich merchant of Lyons, who lived during the latter half of the twelfth century, seems to have fallen in some way under the influence of the revivalists from the East. In his case it was spiritual regeneration that stimulated his hunger for the Word of God, rather than Bible-reading, which led to his conversion. At the same time it is probable that what he heard from the revivalists

<sup>1</sup> The anti-sacerdotal movement was not confined to Southern France. In Northern France and Flanders it assumed wild forms, in some respects anticipating the Anabaptist excesses of the sixteenth century.



was confirmed by so much as he could understand of the words of Scripture embodied in Church ceremony. But it seems certain that, rich though he was, no money could procure him any existing vernacular translations of the Bible. His only course was to pay a clerk in orders to translate parts of the holy book for him. Thus he succeeded in obtaining a version of the Psalms and of the Gospels, perhaps also of other parts of the Old Testament, in addition to the Psalms.

The presentation of such a priceless gift to his fellow-believers gave him a position comparable to that of a rich, pious, and liberal Nonconformist of the nineteenth century in his own denomination. But, alas ! the circumstances were different. For his leadership, instead of bringing him popularity, robbed his earthly life of all ease. That he had the Gospel instinct of devotion to the poor, is sufficiently shown by one of the names bestowed on his followers, "The Poor Men of Lyons." And the innocent audacity with which religion can inspire the poor was shown by the appearance of two of his spiritual brethren before the Pope in the Lateran Council, bearing in their hands their fragmentary version of the Scriptures. That they had no idea of "schism" is shown by their plea for permission to preach the Gospel as they knew it and felt it. Their knowledge of the Bible astonished some ecclesiastics in the Council. But, needless to say, the desired permission was refused. Prohibition, however, did not daunt them, and they returned to continue their mission. The Archbishop of Lyons then charged them, on their allegiance to the Church, to discontinue their work ; and in their own view they were thus called upon to choose between eternal and temporary law. But such men could have no hesitation ; and they

were involved in the frightful persecution which inflicted on the south of France more slaughter, rapine, and misery than the hordes of Huns or the fanatics of Islam.

The authorities of the Church, however, regarded the issue of the Scriptures in a vernacular translation as a danger justifying precautions such as would have been thought cruel and barbarous if employed only against pestilence or famine. The Council of Toulouse in 1229 went so far as to prohibit to laymen even the possession of the Vulgate version, but especially anathematised the vernacular. An exception was indeed made in favour of the Psalms, canticles, and glosses, to assist the illiterate in following the Church services. Otherwise the possession of any portion of the Bible in the mother tongue of the people was considered as presumptive proof of heresy. And to make sure of the detection of this blight in its first germs, the inhuman system of the Inquisition was at this time elaborated in all its terrors. Its horrors, however, are no part of my story here. It is sufficient to note that ecclesiastical experience of the power of the Bible over simple souls appears to have been one of the chief motives inciting a system of draconic repression, shadowy espionage, exasperating tests, insidious traps, cruel tortures, and savage punishment perhaps unrivalled, certainly never surpassed, in all the history of religious crime.

A more legitimate method of combating heresy was conceived almost contemporaneously in Spain and in Italy by Dominic and Francis of Assisi. They founded orders of preaching friars, devoted to absolute poverty, and living for no other end than to confirm the faithful and to bring back wanderers from the fold. Innocent III. showed more worldly wisdom than his predecessor, whom

the Poor Men of Lyons had petitioned for permission to preach, and the Papal sanction for the new orders was obtained. Had the founders exerted their moral authority to rebuke the unholy violence of their allies in the crusade, their fame might have been spotless ; for we do not judge men by their theological opinions now. But, unfortunately, we are not able to credit either of them with more than a superficial regret for what they regarded as an imperious need for the secular arm. Indeed, in the case of Dominic, we may doubt the existence even of regret. It was on descending from the Pyrenees as companion to a bishop on a political mission that Dominic was appalled by the prevalence of so-called "Manichæism" in Provence. On the first night he is said to have converted his heretic host by legitimate argument. But what interests us more is his appeal to the Bible. For, though the story of it survives in the guise of a ridiculous miracle, it may very well, like other miracles, be suggestive of fact. It is said, then, that a schedule of Scripture proofs jotted down by him for a particular conference, leaped out of the fire where it had fallen or been thrown, while a similar trial of the notes of his opponents reduced their fallacies to ash. Thus it would appear that, even where the secular arm was available for the defence of the faith, appeal was first made to the Bible. But whether Scripture or reason was made the court of appeal, it was in those days, as indeed it is often now, with the reservation that only one verdict would be received.

The figure of St Francis of Assisi has a halo of brotherly kindness and glorified humanity around it such that it might seem almost a sacrilege to associate him with the hellish deeds of the Inquisition. But, though he certainly did not take an equal part with Dominic in the organisa-

tion of that horrible system, we have not, so far as I know, any record of a protest on his part against it. At the same time it must be conceded to him that he was as ready to face persecution for himself as to acquiesce in its infliction on others, which he showed by incursions alone and unguarded into the strongholds of Islam. But, for our purpose, it is most needful here to note that he seems to have been as indifferent as Papias of old to written records. That he had an unreasoning reverence for the Bible is of course true ; this was shown by his use of *sortes evangelicæ*. But, like the first Quakers and modern revivalists, he relied more on the living Word and the actually present spirit of God. His indifference extended even to Church service books. "I am your breviary," he is said to have retorted on a follower who lamented the absence of such aids to devotion. And at its first inception his order is said to have had no book but the cross. In fact, the Papal commission had made him, as he supposed, a sort of incarnation of the traditions of the Church from the days of St Peter to his own time. It was this sacred deposit, rather than any creed or gospel, that he was to guard against the assaults of heresy. And with such a form of faith he may very well have acquiesced in the decree of the Council of Toulouse.

We have now reached a point at which it may be well to pause and note the immense difference between the relations of the Bible to everyday life in the nineteenth century and in the Middle Age. In both alike the Book was regarded with awe as a revelation of God's will. But in the nineteenth century it was the Book of the people, accessible to the humblest, read by the otherwise illiterate, known to every child, "familiar in their mouths as household words." In the Middle Ages, on the other



hand, it was the foundation charter of the Church, a portion, and a portion only, of her treasured archives. Like all documents of privilege, it was kept under special guardianship, and only grudgingly shown to the few. To the poor it was inaccessible, not only because of their ignorance, but because of its price. Instead of being scattered broadcast among the illiterate, it was scarcely known even to educated laymen. And, indeed, from the time when Hellenistic Greek in the East, and Latin in the West, ceased to be the ordinary spoken languages of the once Roman provinces, there were thousands of priests who gabbled the services without understanding them, and who were almost totally ignorant of the Bible.

Yet before we unreservedly condemn the economy with which the Church treated the Bible, we ought to give due consideration to the corporate consciousness of the Church and to the indisputable dangers of committing the miscellaneous contents of the sacred literature to unguided use, or perhaps to inevitable misuse by an utterly ignorant populace. As to the first point, it is too often forgotten by ardent Protestants that the Catholic Church has always accepted, in a more literal sense than they do, the concluding words of St Matthew's Gospel: "Lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world." To the Catholic, this does not mean any vague, impersonal influence, nor even an emotional imagination of a personal presence, apart from any corporeal manifestation or articulate expression. It means, rather, that the very flesh and blood, vivified by the immortal spirit of Jesus, are present on the altar after every due and rightful consecration of the elements selected by the Lord himself for this great purpose. It means, moreover, that



Jesus communicated to his apostles, and they to their successors, such a measure of his spirit as enabled them to develop his doctrine with full authority from him. The Western half of the divided Church goes further still, and insists that a primacy with special fulness of authority was conferred by Christ upon St Peter, which primacy and authority have been renewed to every successor of the Prince of Apostles in the See of Rome. With the truth or the falsehood of such views we have here nothing to do. I only insist on the fact that such beliefs prevailed in the Church of the Middle Ages. And this is the corporate consciousness which is too often ignored in Protestant criticisms of the Catholic attitude toward the Bible in the middle centuries of our era. Surely, if it is Christian to regard the above words from St Matthew as fulfilled by a miraculous book and an imagined but inarticulate spirit, the theory is not less Christian, and many think not less rational, which sees the fulfilment of the promise in a perpetually repeated physical miracle, and in an infallible Church or Pope.

It was with a sense of this corporate consciousness that Bail of Abbeville, in his introduction to his *Summary of All Councils*,<sup>1</sup> discussed the question whether Scripture or the Church is prior, in the sense of being the more original authority. "Taking the name 'Church' broadly," he says, "for the congregation of the servants of God, the Church is, in true religion, the prior of the two.

<sup>1</sup> *Summa Consiliorum Omnium*, published in Paris, 1775. It is open to question whether "in vera religione" was intended to be taken with "servientium Deo" or with "prior est." It is therefore, perhaps, best to give the *ipsissima verba*, which run thus: "sumpto latino Ecclesiæ nomine pro congregatione servientium Deo in vera religione prior est Ecclesia; fuit enim hoc ante scripturam et ipsi Ecclesiæ jamdudum esistenti data est Scriptura."

For she existed before the Scripture, and the Scripture was given to the Church already in being." That these words expressed what we may call the official doctrine prevalent during the Middle Ages, there can be no doubt. And this being so, the Church, whose lay members were, to the extent of at least eight-tenths, unable to read, not unnaturally thought that her duty was sufficiently discharged if the treasures of Church consciousness and tradition were imparted to the multitude by means of public services and private ministrations.

In this conception of her duty the Church was confirmed by a prevalent and not unnatural fear that the Bible was, in some respects, a dangerous book for the ignorant layman. This fear did not altogether lack scriptural support; for St Peter was believed to have written, concerning his "beloved brother Paul's" epistles, that there were in them "some things hard to be understood, which they that are unlearned and unstable wrest, *as they do also the other scriptures*, unto their own destruction." Such words would undoubtedly appear to suggest that no Scriptures whatever were quite safe for the unlearned, without guidance. Again, when the Ethiopian eunuch, deep in the prophecies of Isaiah, was asked by the Evangelist Philip, "Understandest thou what thou readest?" the obvious reply was, "How can I, except some man should guide me?" The Catholic Church, then, thought that no disparagement of the Bible was involved in the assumption that all laymen were in the position of this apparently illiterate eunuch, and needed divinely appointed teachers to guide them. Nor should it be

<sup>1</sup> We naturally suppose Bail to have had the New Testament in mind. But his "broad" definition of the Church would, for him, no doubt, include the Mosaic congregation before the law was written.

forgotten that the centre of gravity of the Christian faith, as held from earliest times by Catholic believers, is not an infallible Book, but an infallible Church. True, the Book is infallible from the Catholic point of view, but it is infallible only to those who understand it aright; and the office of the Church is to secure that right understanding.

Very different is the Protestant point of view. For, according to this, the Bible is its own best interpreter; so much so, that if the Book be scattered broadcast among Andaman Islanders, or Sioux Indians, provided only they are taught to read, or someone reads it to them, the plan of salvation must shine out from its pages. For this view also scriptural support may be found, though perhaps scarcely so clear as the passages quoted on the other side. Thus, when one of the writers of the Isaiah literature speaks of a "highway," a "way of holiness," and assures us that the "wayfaring men, though fools, shall not err therein,"<sup>1</sup> he is supposed to be referring to the plainness of the way of salvation as set forth in the New Testament, whereas the true meaning would appear to be that the way of Israel's return from Babylon will be prepared and secured by Israel's God Jahweh.

With more reason, when St Paul adapts to his own purpose the words of the Deuteronomist concerning the plainness of the Mosaic law,<sup>2</sup> he is supposed to be insisting on the clearness of the Gospel to the simple soul without any aid from Rabbi or priest. But then it

<sup>1</sup> Isa. xxxv. 8. The translation is given much otherwise by the learned, as, *e.g.*, by Canon Cheyne in the Polychrome Bible: "The unclean shall not pass over it, and fools shall err elsewhere."

<sup>2</sup> Rom. x. 8.

is not the written but the oral Gospel of which he is speaking—"the word of faith which we preach." Or, again, the beautiful pictures sketched with the consummate art of simplicity in the Synoptic narratives, where we see the faces of toil-worn crowds brightened by the self-evident truths of justice and love and hope, uttered by the Galilean prophet in the searching tones of heartfelt sympathy, are supposed to teach that the weary and heavy-laden have no need of any key to God's revelation, save that revelation itself, whereas the only lesson taught is that humanity at its poorest and worst is still susceptible to pure ideals when they are unfolded by love. From such a familiar experience to the incommensurable conclusion that everything within the covers of the Authorised Version is good for "human nature's daily food," is surely an audacious and irrational inference. Yet it is only by such monstrous reasoning that the Bible has been justified as a school-book, and that patriarchal morality, traditions of savage massacres, the deed of Jael, the story of Micah and the Danites, and of "a certain Levite sojourning on the side of Mount Ephraim," have been put into the hands of Christian children, as a part of "God's book."<sup>1</sup>

It is, of course, true that the attitude of the Church toward the Bible was caused by considerations very different from these. No Protestant believer in verbal inspiration was ever more firmly convinced of the divine dictation of every word in Scripture than was the hierarchy of the Middle Ages. But the key to the meaning of the oracles was in the possession of the Church. And since one mode of revelation was needed to explain the other, there was no inconsistency whatever in the ecclesi-

<sup>1</sup> It is not true to say that no practical evils have resulted. Those experienced in school management know better.



astical objection to allow to the laity the free handling of Scripture, apart from the guidance of the priest. On the other hand, it can scarcely be denied that the limitations imposed upon lay reading of the Bible were excessive and unreasonable. For the Council of Toulouse, not content with a caution against indiscriminate and unguided reading by the "unlearned and unstable," injuriously prohibited the possession by a layman of any portion whatever of the Bible, with the exception of the Psalms. Such a policy may be justly stigmatised as obscurantism. Nor is it any sufficient answer to urge that in those dark times the Church alone maintained schools and founded the universities of the coming day ; for all the schools and all the seats of higher learning were treated solely as nurseries for the Church. And if the limitations imposed upon teachers and scholars alike were happily broken through by the irrepressible vitality of human genius, it was only as a stone fence is cleft by the swelling roots of a sapling which is soon brought within bounds again by the stolid labourer's axe. The tragedy of Roger Bacon is a cruel comment on the claim of the Church to have made monasteries the seed-plots of science. I conclude then, that so far as humanity at large, in its public actions was concerned, the Bible, apart from the Church, possessed, before the age of printing, an influence so indirect and so slight that a superficial observer might have regarded it as negligible. And yet through secret channels, amongst maligned and persecuted sects, its best lessons were gradually permeating the subconscious soul of the Western world, and preparing a new age which has only now begun. With that process we shall be mainly concerned in the succeeding chapters.



## CHAPTER IV

### THE BIBLE IN THE DARKEST AGE

IN any survey of the relations between Church and Bible during the first millennium of the Christian era, our attention is first arrested by the noble reign of King Alfred in England ; for among the ideals of that royal saint was that of a people well instructed in holy writ. Anticipating, as far as the limitations of his time would allow, the modern idea of making the Bible an "English classic," he fastened first of all upon those parts of the sacred book most easily understood by the many, and most fitted to irradiate their squalid lives with finer feeling and more spiritual aims. Therefore it was that he hastened to give to the people in their own as yet barbarous speech the Psalms and the Gospels. That he set at the head of the realm's laws the Ten Commandments in the English of his clan, is a record suggestive perhaps as much of his limitations as of his ambitions ; for it is not told of him that he repudiated graven images, as the first of those commandments required.<sup>1</sup> And, in regard to the Sabbath, he followed the teaching

<sup>1</sup> This was the Jewish interpretation after the Mosaic law assumed its present form. And to this extent the Hebrews may be credited with understanding their own language.

of Jesus rather than that of Moses and the Jews. But the "Ten Words" had been adopted by the Church as a divine code, and this was the sanction that impressed him. Authorities are not unanimous as to the extent of the king's personal share in the work of translation. But this, though a matter of sentimental interest, is of no moment as an evidence of his policy. The vernacular Psalter had existed before his day, but probably needed adaptation to the development of the people's speech. Bede had translated the Fourth Gospel. But the Northumbrian dialect would scarcely be available for the West Saxons. The version, however, of the four Gospels achieved under Alfred's direction, formed the basis on which the early English translation of the immediately succeeding centuries was gradually built up.

It naturally occurs to us that this anxiety for popular knowledge of Scripture ought to have been shown by the Church rather than by the State; by the Bishops rather than by the King. But what has been said above about the corporate consciousness of the Church as in itself the repository of divine revelation goes far to explain the apparent anomaly. At any rate there is, so far as I am aware, no record of any episcopal or papal objection to King Alfred's work. For such absence of opposition a reason is readily conceived in the general orthodoxy of England at that time, and the absence of any apparent tendency to use the Bible as a weapon against the Church. Be that as it may, the absence of any clerical protests suggests a happy contrast to the attitude of the Council of Toulouse two centuries later.

A century and a half before Alfred undertook to give the Gospels to his people, the Venerable Bede, in his dying hours, had dictated the last words of his North-

umbrian English translation of the Fourth Gospel. Whether it was ever much used we do not know ; for very few indeed of his people could read. But at least they could understand it if read to them ; and this was very likely often done by kindly priests, or educated laymen who cared for their servants' welfare. Nor does the possibility of such Gospel-reading to the illiterate seem at all incongruous with the sort of Christian social life suggested in the pathetic description given us by Cuthbert of the Master's death. In reading it we breathe a wholly different air from that of the acrid controversies, mean passions, and stolid superstitions which envenomed the Council of Toulouse. Besides, though King Alfred was pre-eminent, he was by no means alone amongst early English Christians and rulers in his desire to present to the people in their mother tongue the best literature of the Church and the world. For though Bede, by writing in Latin his *Ecclesiastical History*, showed that for this work he expected only cultured readers, he took care to give the people the Creed and the Lord's Prayer in their own language ; and it is said that many illiterate priests were glad of such renderings, and also of "glosses"<sup>1</sup> which helped them to understand the Psalms. But Bede's *Ecclesiastical History* was not allowed to remain long in the obscurity of Latin. For King Alfred, either with his own hand or through his clerks, turned it into the native language. And though it may be doubtful whether there were at that time many people who could read at all, yet had not learned Latin, this translation, like that of the Gospels, made the book

<sup>1</sup> These were interlinear interpretations, putting under each Latin word its English meaning, without regard to the difference of the verbal order in the two languages.

available for such unlearned Englishmen as could get a clerk to read to them.

Even before Bede's time, Aldhelm, Bishop of Sherborne, had turned the Psalms into the vernacular. And still more important is it to recall the well-known story of Cædmon, Bede's countryman, who anticipated and far surpassed the feebler poet of the *Ormulum*, not only in the extent of his work, but in the vigour and impressiveness of its form. For what Cædmon did was to render into ringing alliterative metre and in telling northern phrase the whole story of God's dealings with man as narrated by Hebrew seers and Christian apostles or evangelists. And here we find, I think, a clear illustration of the view taken above concerning the real value of early English translations of the Bible. For though they may have found almost as few readers as the Vulgate did, they were understood by all when read aloud. And the whole circumstances of Cædmon's early history make it certain that what he knew of Bible story was wholly derived from oral instruction or from listening to the reading of such English fragments as already existed.

According to ancient English custom, Cædmon the cow-herd sat with his fellow-servants round the lower end of his master's table, and when the meat had gone round and merriment began, the harp was passed from hand to hand, and even the humblest servant who could sing was applauded as an ornament of the feast. They sang of *Beowulf*; they sang of *Conisburgh* and of many a bloody fight. But gloomy Cædmon sat in silence, and seemed to freeze the flow of song as it approached him. For whether he could sing or not, his thoughts were wandering elsewhere among the mysteries of the world's



beginning, and the brooding of the Divine Spirit over chaos, and the speaking of the Word that said, "Be light, and light was." All this and much more he had heard from priests and readers who, touched by his eager interest, recited these high themes in his own rude speech. He had thought of them alone with his cattle in the forest; he had pondered over them when watching at night and trying to trace the constellations of the sky. But it was neither sullenness nor the pride of an unsympathetic heart that kept him silent or drove him away when the harp approached. But no chord sounded in his soul, and he could not sing. Then one night, repelled thus from the board, he fell asleep amidst his cattle; and in his dreams the tiresome request pursued him: "Sing, Cædmon, sing!" But it was not from jeering companions that the request came now, for a heavenly form stood above him. And when Cædmon humbly pleaded that he knew neither how to sing nor what to sing about, the answer came, "Sing creation!" Then the vision faded, but words, he knew not how, rushed into his mind and ranged themselves in form and fitted themselves to the rude music of the time. When he awoke the dream did not fade into the light of common day; for not only the heavenly vision, but the very words borne in upon him remained in his memory. And when next challenged to sing, he broke into a majestic cadence of sacred song which not only solemnised his jesting companions, but became the talk of the countryside. Hilda, the Abbess of Whitby, heard of the wonder and had no doubt that the Holy Spirit which breathes "where it listeth" had stirred the soul of the devout herdsman. From that time his poetic renderings of Scripture narratives multiplied, until at length the common people could



hear and echo in their everyday speech the whole Bible story of God's dealings with mankind.

Considering all these reminiscences of earliest English life, we may confidently say that if what is called "the Reformation" took a more native form and a more home-like tone in Britain than in the countries of the Continent, this was largely owing to the intensely English character of the aspirations which stirred Cædmon and Bede and Alfred and Orm of the *Ormulum*, and Langland and Wycliffe. But be it remembered that during all this time the Bible itself was, to the common people, a dim and awful mystery, almost as much unknown to them in its real form as the Ark of the Covenant to the Hebrews after it had been once enshrined in the darkest recess of the Temple. Of what was in it they were partly told, just as the Israelites were told of the two stone tablets and the cherubim over the Mercy seat. But whereas to the nineteenth-century Englishmen the Bible was as familiar as the compass to the mariner, the sacred volume was to the Englishman of old, and indeed to the vast majority of Christians, as mysterious and as inaccessible as any miraculous image fallen from heaven and concealed under the jealous guardianship of priests.

It is not necessary to follow closely the relations between the Church and the Bible during the times immediately preceding the tenth century. Indeed, during a large part of the earlier Christian ages the most interesting illustrations of the position held by the Bible will be more conveniently treated in the seventh chapter, dealing with the Bible and Religion. But the attitude of the ecclesiastical mind needs to be observed in those earlier times as well as in the later; the story of the earliest versions must be recalled; and more important

than all, the relation of the Church to the origins of Scripture must be considered. But the moulding of human thought and feeling, the causes of "heresy," whether rightly or wrongly so called, and an attempt to track to its fountain-head the persistent, though precarious and often hidden stream of belief and emotion which, during the nineteenth century, spread into a tide of evangelical faith, must all be relegated to a later page.

During the earlier Middle Ages some of the most interesting illustrations of our subject are to be found in the records of Charlemagne, who dominated Western Europe during the end of the eighth and the beginning of the ninth century.<sup>1</sup> Such illustrations, however, are more to the credit of the State than of the Church. It is true, indeed, that the great king was fortunate in the selection of a scholarly Englishman, Alcuin, a priest of York, as his minister of education. And to the latter the Church was indebted for the practical embodiment of the monarch's ideas. But it is not the less certain that the scheme for schools at ecclesiastical centres, and the work of correcting and re-editing the imperfect and corrupt manuscripts of the Bible in general use at the time, originated from Charlemagne himself.

Thus, in a circular letter to monasteries and chapters, some years before his assumption of the imperial crown, he wrote that he had remarked with much regret the bad grammar, rude expressions, and uncultured style of the communications received even from Churchmen. The sentiments expressed were good, but the mode of expression shocking. "In consequence," he continued,

<sup>1</sup> For the following account of Charlemagne and the Bible, I have compared Guizot (*Cours d'Histoire Moderne*) with the *Capitularies* in the edition of Baluze ; Paris, 1677.

“we have become apprehensive that as there is so little facility in writing, the understanding of Holy Scripture may be much more defective than it ought to be.”<sup>1</sup> He then exhorts Churchmen to put themselves in a condition “to penetrate easily and surely the mysteries of the Holy Scriptures.” “Now, it is certain that, since there are in the Holy Scriptures allegories, metaphors, and the like, that man who has been well instructed in letters will most readily understand them in their true spiritual sense.” “Choose, then, for this work men who have the will and the capacity to learn, and also the art of teaching others.”<sup>2</sup>

Perhaps as a model, perhaps as a stimulus to loyal emulation, a school was established in the Palace under Alcuin as principal. This institution anticipated on a lordly scale the itinerant schools of poor countries in far future times, for Charlemagne’s restless activities kept his Court as well as his armies continually on the move. But wherever the Court went, there went the Palace school also. By that term, however, is not to be understood a place or classes for the instruction of children. The monarch’s sons in their teens were indeed privileged to receive lessons from Alcuin, but the greater number of his pupils were grown men and women, councillors, archbishops, the king’s own sister, and the female relatives of his ministers. Thus the character of the Palace school suggests to us that when Charlemagne wrote as quoted above, insisting on the appointment of teachers to

<sup>1</sup> Recorded in the *Capitularies*, as edited by Etienne Baluze; Paris, 1677, tome I, col. 201.

<sup>2</sup> The words are interesting as containing a germ of the “higher criticism,” and it is noteworthy that they come from a layman. Charlemagne was certainly no saint; but he had a great deal of common sense.

correct the ignorance of the times, he was not thinking of elementary education, nor yet of children's schools, though these were not neglected, but his immediate object was to remedy the lamentable defects of education which left his clergy utterly unfit to explain "the mysteries of holy writ."

Yet it would be almost a ridiculous anachronism to impute to Charlemagne the impossible dream of familiarising his Gallic and German subjects with the letter of the Bible. For only a small minority of them could read ; and the people of his newly conquered German realms were only converted by the sword, remaining absolute pagans in everything but the name. Besides, whenever he mentions "Holy Scriptures," he means the Vulgate version ; and if any forerunners of the Bible Society had conceived the bold idea of giving the Scriptures to the common people in their mother tongue, the multitude of unripe dialects, making most of the tribes mutually unintelligible, presented an obviously insurmountable obstacle. True, the Gothic version of Ulphilas had existed for some four hundred years. But it had probably never been available for more than the immediate congeners of the translator, and in the days of Charlemagne its language was already almost obsolete. When, therefore, we read with sympathy of the desire of Charlemagne to make the Scriptures accessible, we must remember that, to all but ecclesiastics and a very few educated laymen, the accessibility was necessarily indirect and second hand. The clergy were to understand the mysteries ; and from the treasure-house of the Bible they were, as conscientious dispensers of their heavenly Master's mercies, to bring forth things new and old. But the king was most anxious that they



should make the pulpit a fountain of practical morals to the people, and not a place of vantage for the display of clerical learning. He therefore insisted that all sermons should be such as the common people could understand.

It is clear, then, that the age of Charlemagne was characterised by a premature and limited revival of letters, and that the chief motive of this revival was the desire of the king that the pastors of his people should have an efficient knowledge of the Bible. But this partial reform was promoted by the secular power, which made a great Churchman its instrument. It is this Churchman whose letters bear testimony to the earnestness of the king's resolve. And one of Alcuin's letters to his master has, from this point of view, a touch of pathetic interest. It was written not long after the imperial coronation at Rome in A.D. 800, from which gorgeous ceremonial the wearied minister and student with difficulty obtained permission to absent himself. He was in his Abbey of St Martin at Tours, whither he had been allowed to retire for the short remainder of his days; and in that retirement he had completed his long labours on the revision of the imperfect manuscripts of the Bible in ordinary use. Charlemagne was now at the summit of all human dignity. He was a far greater man than the Emperor of the East. The Pope was practically his subject, and he could smile at the ecclesiastical pretence that the Pontiff had conferred upon him his crown. It was to the man who ruled almost all lands between the Northern seas and the Mediterranean, who had come in pomp from Rome, acclaimed and almost adored as the monarch of half the world, that Alcuin wished to make some gift worthy of his acceptance.



"I have long considered," thus he wrote, "what gift I could offer to you which might not be unworthy of the splendour of your imperial power, and which might add something to your wealth, redundant though that is. While others were bringing you all kinds of precious gifts, I was not content that my small talent should lie torpid in shameful sloth, nor that the bearer of my homage should appear with empty hands before the face of your majesty. At last I have found, with the assistance of the Holy Spirit's inspiration, something fitting for one in my position to offer you, and which might be agreeable to your wisdom. Certainly,<sup>1</sup> in the eagerness of your most sacred piety, one may clearly see what the Holy Spirit is effecting for the welfare of the whole Church, and why the extension of your empire to its utmost limits of glory is desired by so many prayers of the faithful throughout the world, and also that at home it may be congenial to all the faithful, and terrible abroad to all adversaries of the Lord.

"But while I was thus searching and pondering, it seemed to me that nothing could be found more worthy of your serene majesty than gifts of the divine books which by the dictation of the Holy Spirit and the ministration of Christ the Lord were written with the pen of heavenly grace for the salvation of all mankind. These books, brought together into the unity of one clear shining<sup>2</sup> (*clarissimi*) body and laboriously freed from clerical error, I have addressed to your illustrious majesty by a distinguished son of yours and a faithful servant to you, so that with full

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<sup>1</sup> "Ergo" (*sic*). But the word, if genuine, introduces no inference, and seems merely to emphasise the following words.

<sup>2</sup> As words with the same, or a closely similar primary significance in different languages, may, at the same time, have dissimilar connotations, it is impossible always to use the same English word to express the same foreign word. Here, *e.g.*, "clarissimus" applied to a holy volume, to a ruling sovereign, and to an officer or son of Charlemagne, had, in the mind of the writer, different connotations, which require a change in the English word.

hands he may present himself in the delightful service of your majesty. . . . If my loyalty had been able to discover anything better, I should eagerly offer it for the increase of your honour."

The familiar phrase "divine books" might seem to justify the evangelical tradition of the Bible as a continuous shechinah undimmed in the darkest ages of the Church, though at such times accessible only to a few. But it can do no service to real religion to forget that other books have been so called with equal fervour. And it would show a total misapprehension of the relations of the Bible and the Church in those times to regard the Book as other than the reputed title-deeds of the Church to the theocratic power which she claimed over the souls of men. In one respect, indeed, it may be held that the imperious Charlemagne at least supposed himself to be guided by the voice of Scripture rather than by the mock thunders of the Vatican. For he was certainly inclined to sympathise with the iconoclasts in their protest against the worship of images. This is shown by a decree of the so-called Council of Frankfort, which was much more a Diet of the Empire than a spiritual assembly. That assembly condemned the *worship* of images without, however, prohibiting their use as ornaments or even aids to devotion.

But all we need note here is the reference to the Bible in what we may take to be the king's own explanation of the meaning of the decree. For he classes the Bible with the Cross and the Holy Sacraments and the communion vessels and the church building itself as entitled to more reverence than ought to be shown to any image. But surely this classification betrays relics of fetishism. For whether it be the Cross, or the con-

secrated elements, or the vessels holding them that are classed with the Bible, it is the *thing* that is venerated. And it is impossible to avoid the inference that the Bible was treated in like manner. This tendency to fetishism constituted the essential evil in the use of holy images when such use exceeded the limit of aids to aspiration. And that use may be as easily exceeded in the contemplation of a book as in reverence to a symbolic wafer or a consecrated cup. Image-worship was by no means the worst feature of Church corruption in that age. But Charlemagne was never sufficiently imbued with the moral and social spirit of the New Testament to anticipate in any degree the spiritual and rational religion which still remains one of "the powers of the world to come."

The iconoclastic controversy which, during the eighth century, so much excited the Eastern Church, is of little use for our purpose. For though it might be supposed to illustrate bondage to the letter of the Mosaic law, it seems much more likely that the movement was occasioned by the alarming progress of Islam. For the Unitarians, as the Mahommedans have been sometimes called, taunted the Trinitarian Christians with their polytheism, as evidenced, not only by dogma, but by ritual; since all the churches were full of images, revered by kneeling or prostrate worshippers. Indeed, Gibbon is almost certainly right in tracing the iconoclastic zeal of Leo the Isaurian to that rude soldier's early experience of Mahommedan valour, and, perhaps, his association of the success of their arms with their fanatic zeal against idols.

The Scriptures, then, had very little to do with the controversy; and as to the relations of the Church to the Bible in that age, I shall content myself with quoting Dean

Milman's criticism of the epistolary denunciations addressed by Pope Gregory II. in the earlier part of the eighth century to the Emperor Leo :—"The strange mistakes in the history of the Old Testament, the still stranger interpretations of the New, the loose legends which are advanced as history, give a very low opinion of the knowledge of the times. As a great public document addressed to the whole Christian world by him who aspired to be the first ecclesiastic, we might be disposed to question its authenticity, if it were not avouched by the full evidence in its favour, and its agreement with all the events of the period." The ecclesiastical historian then goes on to quote from the Pope's epistle :—"Where the body is, says our Lord, there will the eagles be gathered together. The body is Christ ; the eagles the religious men who flew from all quarters to behold him. When they beheld him, they made a picture of him. Not of him alone. They made pictures of James, the brother of the Lord, of Stephen, and of all the martyrs ; and so having done they disseminated them throughout the world to receive, not worship, but reverence."<sup>1</sup> "You boast that as Uzziah (Hezekiah) after 800 years cast out the brazen serpent from the Temple, so after 800 years you have cast out the idols from the churches. Uzziah (Hezekiah) truly was your brother, as self-willed and like thee daring to offer violence to the priests of God." The angry and ignorant Pope declared that if the Emperor should enter a children's school and declare himself a destroyer of images, the pupils would

<sup>1</sup> Reading such passages, Protestants may well ask, what is the worth of ecclesiastical tradition? But the same Protestants, when dealing with the supposed links of Irenæus—Polycarp—John, the son of Zebedee, are possibly moved by another bias to exaggerate possibilities and minimise improbabilities in quite a different mood.



all throw their tablets at his head, and he "would thus be taught by these foolish ones what he refuses to learn from the wise." On which Dean Milman pertinently asks : "What would well-instructed children now say to a Pope who mistook Hezekiah (called Uzziah) for a wicked king, his destroying the brazen serpent for an act of impiety, and asserted that David placed the brazen serpent in the *Temple*?"<sup>1</sup> When such ignorance was shown by one claiming to be Christ's earthly vicar, I may leave it to the reader to imagine what was the popular knowledge of the Bible in the age when this chief Pastor reigned.

Much more profitable will it be for us now to change our field of observation and to concentrate our attention for a while on the Paulicians, mentioned above as the probable spiritual progenitors of the Albigenses, and of the still more modern evangelical school of religion, who insist that in questions concerning the revelation of God to man, the Bible and not the Church is the only arbiter. The story of this sect, if such it can be called, commences in the latter half of the seventh century. But it is most convenient for our review to take our stand in the ninth century, when, after being driven by persecution to take up carnal weapons, they had, under a vigorous leader, Carbeas, fortified a stronghold called Tephric on the mountainous borders of Armenia. Here partly the strength of the position, and partly the political circumstances of the time, gave them a precarious security for many years. Whatever their spiritual aspirations had originally been, they had now succumbed to a cruel fate, and, like David and his men in the cave of Adullam, had become a mere horde of bandits. In their excursions they often captured Catholics, called by them "Romans,"

<sup>1</sup> Milman's *Latin Christianity*, ed. 1854, Book iv., chap. vii. p. 160.

in curious anticipation of modern Protestant phraseology, and these captives, when not killed in fight, were held to ransom.

Now in 870 there was resident at Constantinople in the Emperor's service a shrewd and most worldly wise Catholic priest, Peter of Sicily. His worldly wisdom had been shown in quitting the island of his birth at the first sign of danger there from Mahomedan incursions; and his shrewdness speedily won for him employment and promotion at the Imperial Court. He was specially favoured by Basil I. When, therefore, in the year 870, the Emperor felt specially anxious to obtain the release of certain captives held at Tephrike, he selected Peter as the best man for the mission, investing him, of course, with the immunity of an envoy. Thus he came into personal intercourse with Carbeas and the leaders of the sect. And as his business could not be discharged at once, he spent nine months in the heretical stronghold. Then on his return home he composed a *History of the Manichæans*, and several discourses against them. But Photius, who from a private soldier rose to be Patriarch of Constantinople, also wrote, during the same period, a much larger work on the same subject. Now the story of the rise and progress of the Paulicians is in both these works so entirely similar, that learned editors have differed much on the question of priority. The circumstances of the case, however, and certain slight differences in the mode of telling the tale, point to Peter as the original narrator, who was honoured by the holy Patriarch's adoption of his report.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> To a certain extent the two histories seem related to each other, as are two of the Synoptic Gospels, say, Matthew and Mark. The facts alleged are in general identical, and considerable passages coincide even verbally. There are, however, differences. For example, the story of the

What they both tell us, then, is as follows :—In the reign of Constantine Pogonatus, about the year 668, at Mananalis, a village of Samosata in Armenia, and a notorious centre of Manichæism, there was living a certain Constantine, belonging to the sect. At his door there appeared a way-worn traveller, a Catholic deacon returning homewards from captivity in Syria. The Manichæan was not inhospitable, and entertained the stranger until he was fit to resume his journey. At parting, the grateful guest presented his host with two books, one of which was a volume of the “holy Gospel, and the other of the Apostle.”<sup>1</sup> To modern ears the description sounds vague. But to Peter’s first readers it meant one or more of the four Gospels and the Epistles, or part of the Epistles of St Paul. The second book probably included the Acts ; for Constantine showed afterwards more knowledge of St Paul’s work and companions than the Epistles alone could give him. To the Manichæan these books came as a revelation. Whether his mind had been at all prepared by religious conversations with his guest, we are not told ; and the effect of the books upon him we have to infer as well as we can for ourselves from the bigoted, bitter, and obviously distorted narratives of Peter and Photius. At any rate it is acknowledged that

conversion of Sergius is given more vividly by Peter, and the conversation is in the first person, whereas Photius adopts sometimes the third person. For myself, while not presuming to dispute with more learned critics, I think that a man who had spent nine months in Tephrike, was more likely to furnish material to a man who had never been there at all, than to borrow a second-hand narrative from another who, so far as this part of the polemic is concerned, must have known less than himself. Thus Gibbon did not lose much by his inability to consult Photius (*Decline and Fall*, vol. vii. p. 47, *n.*, Dr Wm. Smith’s ed.).

<sup>1</sup> “μίαν (βίβλον) τοῦ ἁγίου Ἐυαγγελίου καὶ ἑτέραν τὴν τοῦ ἀποστόλου,” Petrus, *Sic. Hist. Man. K.*, in Migne’s *Patrologia*.

he "threw away" his Manichæan library and concentrated his whole attention on the words of Jesus and the work and writings of St Paul. Not only so, but, according to Peter's own acknowledgment, the convert openly renounced and denounced the "absurdities and blasphemies" of the Gnostics whom he had followed. And, so far as we can gather, his remaining unpardonable crime was his too exclusive attention to the parts of the New Testament in his possession, and his adhesion to a simpler form of Christianity than that taught by the Church.

What that simpler religion was, may fairly be inferred from the examination of one of Constantine's successors before the Patriarch of Constantinople in the reign of Leo the Isaurian (716-741). No doubt there had been in the meantime some development of doctrine, as there always is in the youth of every vigorous religion; but the main lines of their teaching had certainly not been changed. From that examination, then, we gather that the Paulicians did not venerate the material Cross; neither did they worship the Virgin Mary, or regard her as "the Mother of God." They did not believe in transubstantiation, nor did they even recognise the duty of communion in bread and wine. They did not practise water baptism, and, according to Peter, they defended themselves on this point by saying, "It is written, 'I am the living water,'"<sup>1</sup> words which do not occur in the New Testament. Still further, they regarded their conventicles as the Holy Catholic Church, and considered the "Roman" Church to be utterly corrupt. Other peculiarities not mentioned in this examination are given on the authority

<sup>1</sup> "Διότι γέγραπται Ἐγὼ εἰμι τὸ ὕδωρ τὸ ζῶν." Jesus speaks much of "living water" as his gift, but never uses exactly the alleged phrase. It is curious that Peter does not notice this.



of Peter. Thus they are said to have disowned entirely the Old Testament. But, as this was a tenet of the Manichæism which, according to Peter himself, the first Paulician renounced and anathematised, this is very probably untrue; or only true in the sense that they depreciated the Old Testament in comparison with the New, as indeed did St Paul. In the New Testament they are said to have accepted the Gospels and the fourteen Epistles of St Paul. It is, however, uncertain whether they had the four Gospels at first. And though we are told that they received nearly all the rest of the New Testament except the epistles now attributed to St Peter, we may very well doubt whether this was true of the earliest generation of the sect.<sup>1</sup> Further, according to our authorities, whom there is here no reason for doubting, the Paulicians did not use the name "presbyter" for their clergy, if indeed they had any "clergy." At any rate, they made no outward distinction between the ministering brethren and others.

The negations here mentioned are not directly declared in the examination above mentioned; for the new sect had anticipated by more than a thousand years the disingenuous habit of evading detection in heresy by saying one thing and meaning another. Thus, when asked by the Patriarch, "Why dost thou not believe in and worship the precious Cross?" the accused replied, "Anathema be the man who does not worship and adore the precious and life-giving Cross." But what he meant by the Cross was the dying Jesus extended in that form.

<sup>1</sup> The editor of Migne's issue here quotes a marginal note by an ancient hand, *antiqua manu*, to the effect that it was doubtful whether they originally used these books, or even the Acts of the Apostles. It is added that in the time of the writer of the note they only used two gospels, and preferred St Luke's. They had also the Epistle to the Laodiceans.

In like manner, by "the Mother of God" the heretic meant the heavenly Jerusalem, "the mother of us all." By the body and blood of Jesus in the communion he understood the words of the Lord. Finally, his ideas of baptism and of the Church enabled him fervently to curse those who depreciated either. But he meant one thing, and his judges another. Let us hope that his escape from condemnation is a proof of the comparative leniency of the Patriarch. On the other hand, this facile ingenuity in prevarication suggests a very profound difference between such wily arts and Luther's dogged defiance of Pope and Devil. Such considerations, however, cannot cancel the obvious indications given above of certain anticipations of the Protestant Reformation. It must be added that many of the sect gave proof of a much sterner courage, and rivalled in their endurance the early martyrs of the Christian faith.

Why were these reformers called Paulicians? Their orthodox historians and persecutors maintained that they took the name from a certain obscure Paul, who belonged to a third generation of the school. But Gibbon believed that they owed it to their unbounded devotion to the doctrines and tradition of the great apostle of the Gentiles. And the critical discernment of the historian is amply confirmed by such unwilling witnesses as the Sicilian Peter and the Patriarch Photius. For they tell us, for instance, that Constantine the founder, after his conversion, chose to be called Silvanus. And his successors during the two centuries following always adopted on their accession the name of some companion of St Paul's travels, such as Titus, Timothy, Tychicus, and others. In their missionary journeys, also, they followed mainly the footsteps of St Paul, and are even accused by their

enraged foes of professing to be the very men whose names they took.

These facts seem to leave no room for doubt that as the disciples at Antioch were called Christians, because of their devotion to the name of Christ,<sup>1</sup> so the name "Paulicians," whether assumed by themselves or conferred by others, was borne by these people because of their almost exclusive insistence on the Gospel as expounded by St Paul. If, on the other hand, it must be acknowledged that much of their practice and teaching appear inconsistent with true Paulinism, the obvious answer is that such practices and teaching are known to us through the passionately prejudiced writings of their persecutors. And how violent, how savage, how utterly outrageous the rancour of these opponents was can scarcely be conceived by those whose experience of theological bitterness is confined to the religious controversies of modern times.<sup>2</sup> In dealing with such witnesses we are justified in suspecting misrepresentation wherever it might serve the cause they are pleading, and this may go far to explain away some of their most plausible allegations against these devotees of St Paul. Observing this caution, we may well refuse to believe that their leaders tried to impose themselves upon the men of Macedon or on the Pauline churches as the very Titus or Timothy or Tychicus who had been inspired by the apostle. We may suspect that the alleged relics of Manichæism in

<sup>1</sup> Whether there was a pun on *χρηστὸς* suggesting a taunt of "goodness" or not, is of no consequence. It was "*χριστὸς*" that gave the name.

<sup>2</sup> The authors whom I am following can scarcely mention a Paulician name without attaching to it some thundering epithet of reproach. And in mockery of the sentiment which led to the adoption of the names of St Paul's companions, they often substitute punning distortions; e.g. for Timothy (*Τιμόθεος*), Thymothy (*θυμόθεος*), i.e. "wrath of God" instead of "honour of God."

their doctrine were simply some exaggeration of St Paul's doctrine concerning the opposition of the natural and the spiritual, some fondness for contrasting the splendours of the new covenant with the darkness of the old, some excessive scruple about material symbols,<sup>1</sup> and some extreme interpretations or misinterpretations of the apostle's preference for the celibate life. As to their morals, at least down to the period of their desperate uprising against pitiless persecution, the reiterated sneers of their critics at their attempt to make virtue an excuse or a cloak for heresy is sufficiently suggestive.

Let us now return to the converted Manichæan, Constantine of Mananalis, who in his enthusiasm for St Paul took the name of Silvanus, or Silas. Fired with the example he had set before himself, he devoted the whole remainder of his life to an itinerant ministry of the Gospel as he understood it. Macedonia, where the first European church had been gathered at Philippi, had a special charm for him. Taking with him the Epistles, he said to the people: "You are the Macedonians here mentioned, and I am the Silvanus sent to you by the apostle." If these words are correctly reported, what he meant was: "I am as much devoted to your apostle as was Silas; receive me as coming in his spirit."<sup>2</sup> That his appeal was made on some such reasonable grounds, and not on the ridiculous pretence that he was the identical Silas come back in the flesh, may fairly be inferred from a successful ministry of twenty-seven years. He then became the first martyr of his sect. For much complaint

<sup>1</sup> To such men St Paul's deprecatory language about water baptism (1 Cor. i. 14, 17) might seem to mean more than it does to us.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Luke i. 17 concerning John the Baptist, "and he shall go before him in the spirit and power of Elias"; and the words of Jesus (Matt. xvii. 12), "I say unto you that Elias is come already."



was made at the Imperial Court of the spread of the heresy, and accordingly a royal commissioner named Symeon was sent to make inquiry. The local governor, Trypho, was summoned to attend the commissioner, and together, at the head of a strong body of troops, they surrounded and captured the whole congregation of Paulicians in Cibossa, the headquarters of the sect.

Accounts somewhat differ as to what followed. For, according to Photius, every effort was made to induce the followers of Silvanus to recant and to return as penitents to the Church. Peter, who had better opportunities of ascertaining the facts, says nothing of this. Both, however, agree that the heresiarch, apparently by order of Symeon, was made to stand as a target before his followers and they were commanded to stone him to death. Both also happily agree that the unnerved disciples would not or could not obey. The stones dropped from the paralysed hands of all but one—Justus—a Pauline name—alleged to have been the adopted son of the martyr. This Justus, seizing a massive stone, hurled it with such vigour as to kill his spiritual father, and by his encomiasts is celebrated as a second David, slaying a more dangerous Goliath. If we may believe Photius, the rest of the Paulicians, seeing their teacher now dead, did not hesitate to bury his corpse beneath the stones they now cast on it. “And so,” say our authorities, with a reminiscence of scriptural language, “the place is called Sorus—the cairn—to this day.”

But now followed a most startling analogy to the new birth of St Paul himself. For as Saul of Tarsus is not unreasonably supposed by many commentators on his story to have been affected more than he was himself

aware by the serene heroism of Stephen, so it would appear that Symeon was never the same man after witnessing that scene at Cibossa. Perhaps the impression was deepened by the unaccountable persistence of the supposed penitents in maintaining their convictions. For, with amazement, Peter tells us that though offered instruction and restoration by the ministers of the Church, they "actually chose rather to perish in their wickedness than through repentance to propitiate their God and to obtain everlasting salvation." Even we, at the end of more than a thousand years after the event, are convinced by the evidence of their most deadly foes, that in some way these people must have caught a spark of the holy fire that baptized the first Christians. To us, therefore, it should not be inexplicable that Symeon, who, beneath his official dress kept something of a human heart, began to feel relents and dread. He returned to Constantinople and made his report. He continued still three years in the Imperial employ; but could not silence a troubled conscience. We might suspect here an intentional adaptation of the story of St Paul's brief autobiography (*cf.* Gal. i. 18). But certainly our authorities would not have lent themselves to such a design; and the resignation of an Imperial post for a martyr's career must have cost a hard struggle. Photius, indeed, seems to have been aware of this. For he tells us that the distracted man "during the space of three years managed to hide within himself and to soothe to quietness the wild beast (of heresy) until, his heart being inwardly devoured, and the yearning for expression becoming insupportable, he secretly left the Court" for Cibossa. He had less difficulty than his ideal apostle in obtaining recognition from those whom he had persecuted;

and, in fact, was welcomed as a new leader. The marvellous change was signalised by the adoption of the name Titus.<sup>1</sup> But his maintenance of the forlorn hope was brief, for at the end of three years he was burned alive.

The immediate occasion of his condemnation is somewhat puzzling, and indeed inexplicable as it has come down to us. But as it illustrates the eagerness with which St Paul's words were discussed by the Paulicians, we must not pass it over. We are rather startled to find the traitor Justus, the murderer of Constantine-Silvanus, apparently still frequenting the meetings of the sect. But, if we are to believe our authorities at all, we can only suppose that Justus had urged the coward's plea of necessity, or that the Paulicians were more forgiving than religious zealots usually are. At any rate, we are told that a debate arose between this man and the new leader on the meaning of Col. i. 16: "For by him were all things created, etc." Unfortunately we are not told what the interpretation of Symeon-Titus was, though the insinuation is that he tried to reconcile the passage with the Manichæan denial of the creation of matter by eternal goodness. I have already expressed my opinion that Constantine's renunciation of Manichæism was genuine; and I cannot help suspecting that words so pregnant with problems impossible of solution might very well cause deadly strife between two subtle Greeks without any reference to the Zoroastrian doctrine of Two Principles, as held by the Manichæans. However that may be, since Justus could not prevail by argument, he appealed to the Bishop of the neighbouring Coloneia.

<sup>1</sup> Peter says he will not call him *Títos*, but *Kḗtros*—the whale or monster a puerile play on sounds, now only interesting as suggesting how the vowel *η* was pronounced at that time.

The Bishop became inquisitor, and condemned, or obtained the condemnation of, Symeon.

Then followed the obscure Paul referred to above, about whom nothing is told us of any significance except that he had two sons, Gegnesius and Theodore, who disputed the pre-eminence.<sup>1</sup> The dispute remained unsettled so long as both were alive, but Gegnesius had the honour of being selected under Leo the Isaurian for the judicial examination previously described.<sup>2</sup>

The next succeeding incidents in the story do not interest us. The headquarters of Paulicianism were transferred to its place of origin, Mananalis, until the rage of the "Romans" on the one hand, and the uncertainty of their somewhat strange relations with the Saracens on the other, drove them to seek a place of more safety. It was during this time of uncertainty that one of the most interesting of their leaders comes into view, Sergius, called also Tychicus. It is not so much because of his own personality that he is specially interesting, as because the story of his perversion or conversion from Catholicism has come to us in a reasonably probable form. It would seem that he was not born within the sect,<sup>3</sup> as were most of the successors of Silvanus, but was brought up in the Catholic Church to the period of adolescence. He then made the acquaintance of a young

<sup>1</sup> Gegnesius claimed to have received inspiration from his father who had ascended to heaven; while Theodore was bolder, and declared that he had his gift direct from the Eternal. Such accounts, coming to us through a double deposit of virulent bigotry, must be taken for what they are worth.

<sup>2</sup> See p. 100-1.

<sup>3</sup> His father is said to have been a certain Dryinus of Armia, a village near the town of Tabia. That the boy was well educated, according to the Catholic standard of the time, in everything but religion, may be gathered from what follows.



woman whose name is not given, but who belonged to the Paulicians. And she, seeing in him a likely proselyte, introduced the subject as follows<sup>1</sup> :—

“ ‘ I hear of you, Mr Sergius (κύριε Σέργιε), that you have had a good education, and are skilled in letters, and are in all respects a worthy man. Tell me, then, why you do not read the Divine Gospels ? ’ Then he, entrapped by her words, and not in the least suspecting the poison of malice concealed within her, says : ‘ It is not lawful for us laymen (κοσμικοῖς) to read them, but only for the priests (ἱερεῦσι). ’ She replied to him : ‘ It is not so, as you suppose ; for there is no respect of persons with God ; for he wills that all men should be saved, and should come to the knowledge of the truth. But since your priests make a trade of the Word of God, they also keep back the deeper truths<sup>2</sup> in the Gospels. For they do not read to the hearer all that is written therein ; but some parts they read and some they don’t, lest you should come to the knowledge of the truth. For it is written in those Gospels : “ In that day many shall say unto me, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name,<sup>3</sup> and in thy name cast out devils, and in thy name done many wonderful works ? And the king, answering, will say to them, Verily, verily, I say unto you, I know you not.” ’<sup>4</sup> Search and see if it is not thus written. And

<sup>1</sup> Petrus Siculus, *Historia Manichæorum*, xxxiii.

<sup>2</sup> Μυστήρια ; but the above is obviously meant, as also in Matt. xiii. 11 and some other New Testament passages, though perhaps not in all. For St Paul seems occasionally to use the word in a sense familiar to the secret cults of his day ; e.g. Col. i. 26. So also in the Apocalypse, xvii. 5, 7.

<sup>3</sup> These words are omitted by Peter, though given by Photius. I do not think the omission by the former was intentional.

<sup>4</sup> Here also Photius follows more closely the actual words of Matt. vii. 22.

who are they to whom the Lord will say, "I know you not"? "But he," says Peter the Silician, "being without training or learning, was dumbfounded, and said nothing."

Peter then interposes his own explanation ; but space is too precious to be occupied by it, and we proceed to the next interview of the young Sergius with his instructress. He had been reading the Gospels now for the first time, and, having found the words quoted by her, was very anxious she should tell him who were those false prophets. But she, whether from the feminine arts attributed to her by Photius, or because she anticipated the "heuristic" system of recent great teachers, and desired her pupil to find out for himself, would not satisfy him, but propounded another question. Quoting the words, "Many shall come from the east and the west and shall sit down with Abraham and Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven, but the sons of the kingdom shall be cast into outer darkness," she asked, "Who are the sons of the kingdom?" He could not tell. But this time she supplied the answer. "They are," she said, "your saints who cast out devils and heal the diseases of men, whom you venerate as gods, while you neglect the living and immortal Lord."<sup>1</sup>

The remaining course of instruction is not recorded. We are only told that the Paulician woman went through the Gospels with him, perverting the plain meaning, as she herself very well knew, and finally fashioning him into the most mischievous tool of Satan that the accursed

<sup>1</sup> Photius has here, "God," Θεόν. But Peter's "Lord," Κύριον, seems preferable. For the motto of the early Paulicians was, like that of latest reformers, "Back to Christ." But the meaning is obscure, which may be partly owing to the reporters.

sect had yet produced. The above citation from the Sermon on the Mount, however, seems to me to expose the falsehood of the accusation against the Paulicians, that they shared Manichæan contempt for the Old Testament. For though the presence of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in heaven is here only indirectly inferred from the words spoken by "the living and immortal Lord," yet it is clearly accepted. And it seems necessarily implied that all other references of Jesus to the first institution of marriage, to Moses, to David and the Prophets, would be accepted in like manner. But if so, it seems quite impossible that the Paulicians can have denied all value to the Old Testament. The true Manichæans, as I suppose, did not regard such utterances as the words of the divine Christ, but as those of the man Jesus. There is, however, no indication of such subtlety of distinction in the simple talk of this Paulician woman. It is true that Peter Siculus scoffs at the alleged dishonesty with which she apparently ignored the obvious explanation that the disinherited sons of the kingdom were the Israelites. But it may well be held that she took a large and far-sighted view of the significance of the words of Jesus, when she saw in them a warning of the precariousness of all spiritual privilege and supernatural pretensions apart from true loyalty to "the living and immortal Lord." To some, her words may suggest an incarnate Word, to others a personal deity, to others again "the moral ideal," and to yet others the infinite ordered life of the universe. But in any case the doctrine she deduced from the saying of Jesus is true.

It is noteworthy that the new leader, Sergius Tychicus, is said to have been specially dangerous because of his apparent virtues, and because of his skill in making his

heresy look like true religion. It is interesting also to learn that in his first approaches to converts he taught morals only, and adapted these to the words of the Gospel. It was only after the victim had been bewitched by the beauty of a moral ideal that the soul-destroying deceiver made him swallow the whole poison of impious doctrine.<sup>1</sup> Where all is obscure, it is difficult to form a confident judgment. But now let us suppose that Sergius began his instructions by revealing more of the New Testament than had been usually heard by his uninstructed audience. Let us imagine him to have dwelt on the stirring or touching moral exhortations in St Paul's Epistles, such as Rom. xii., or 1 Cor. xiii. We may well suppose that he spoke of such inspiring words as coming from the spirit of Christ exemplified in the Sermon on the Mount. He could hardly forbear, then, to suggest how much better it was for men seeking salvation to study the Gospels and Epistles for themselves, than to be dependent on the mediation of priests.

If, then, he went on to expose the difference between Church ceremonialism and the Pauline doctrine of faith ; if he insisted that neither the water of baptism nor the material elements of communion were of any value at all except possibly as symbols to help concentration of thought ; still further, if he taught that the veneration of the Cross was superstition, the worship of the Virgin Mary idolatry, and subjection to the Catholic Church spiritual slavery, he would have done quite enough to provoke the invectives to which we have referred. Such conjectures are based upon the words of his opponents themselves. And if I decline to accept charges made by the latter of gross Manichæism, it is because these

<sup>1</sup> Photius, *op. cit.*, I. xxii.



writers stultify themselves by telling us almost in the same breath that the Paulicians only pretended to abandon Manes in order to escape persecution, and were at the same time incorrigible heretics, who preferred death to the surrender of their beliefs.<sup>1</sup> That these beliefs were very imperfect, could they be compared with the ideals of a Wycliffe or a Wesley, is not only possible, but almost certain. Yet in their preference of the written words of Jesus and his greatest apostle to the Catholic tradition, and in their assertion of the incommensurable superiority of the spiritual life to thaumaturgic ritual, it is extremely probable that they kept glimmering the sacred spark which flamed forth in the Reformation.

The further vicissitudes of Paulicianism are described by the master-hand of Gibbon with luminous brevity, and those who care to follow the story can do so in his fifty-fourth chapter. Briefly, the ministry of Sergius, extending to thirty-three or thirty-four years, was the last period of their existence as purely spiritual reformers. In speaking of the experience of Peter the Sicilian I have already anticipated the effects of a revived persecution, which converted them from scattered groups of zealots

<sup>1</sup> As an instance of very palpable perversion, take the following: Photius says that these people "sealed their prayers, or rather their howlings, with the name of Sergius, saying, The prayer of the Holy Ghost shall bring us mercy" (*op. cit.*, xxi.). Surely the reference was to Rom. viii. 26, "The Spirit also maketh intercession for us," etc. And if Sergius is quoted as making arrogant or even blasphemous claims to be the doorkeeper, and the shepherd, and "the light of the House of God" till the end of the world, we must remember we have not the text of his epistles, and a very little alteration would make the words refer to St Paul and Christ. As to the charge that each successive Paulician leader who assumed a Pauline name (Silvanus, Tychicus, etc.) claimed to be a reincarnation of the very man whose name he assumed, it is simply incredible.

into guerilla soldiers. Their later leader, Carbeas, was chosen rather for his previous military training than for any spiritual gifts, and his fortification and defence of Tephricé fully justified their choice. A successor, Chrysocheir, made them a still more formidable power, and they negotiated with the Emperor Basil almost on equal terms. They had forgotten the saying of Christ: "All they that take the sword shall perish with the sword." But after about a century of defiant independence, their stronghold was captured; and within an interval of some years they were forcibly deported into Thrace, where it was supposed they might serve the political purposes of the time. Here they are said to have spread their opinions, though, it must be feared, in a very corrupt form.<sup>1</sup> That they finally made their way westward, as suggested by Gibbon, is extremely probable. And if only a few had preserved the Pauline tradition, its reception by an emotional population and in new surroundings might very well account for the religious revival in the south of France during the eleventh and twelfth centuries.

As already admitted, the story of the Paulicians is in many parts obscure. But the illustrations it offers of the relations of the Church to the Bible are clear enough. And, what is perhaps more interesting, it gives a striking instance of the power wielded by the Gospel and Epistles, in that age of the world, over minds craving for reality—minds dissatisfied with the traditional Church ceremonial, and wanting a clearer sense of the Infinite Life which earlier and later fetishism alike had at once suggested

<sup>1</sup> The imputations made against them under the name "Bulgarians" must be taken as the slander of bigotry. If they lived among an immoral population, the vices of their neighbours would be attributed to them.

and obscured. For though even orthodox churches are now finding out the limitations of St Paul, and are respectfully discarding his laboured theories of sin, death, and atonement,<sup>1</sup> there was in the man an intensity of moral passion together with a searching power of self-impartation which endured far through the Christian centuries and is not extinguished yet. But this power did not depend upon miracle nor upon "revelation" in the supernatural sense of the word. It was the impact of a concentrated moral force on minds whose susceptibility to it was the result of a long course of evolution brought to fruition by the whole conditions of their age.

Protestants, no doubt, prefer to conceive the experience of the Paulician in another form, and I shall not deny its approximate truth. But it is not inconsistent with what I have said. A man whose religion had largely consisted in obedience to priests, when he was assured, as we have seen, that "there is no respect of persons with God," felt like a liberated slave. A man forbidden to meddle with sacred lore, felt an accession of self-respect when he learned that God would have all men—not priests alone—come to the knowledge of the truth. A man unable to think how his salvation could depend upon eating a consecrated wafer or drinking out of a miraculous cup, could not but rejoice to hear that "the kingdom of God is not meat and drink, but righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost." To critical minds the philosophy of the plan of salvation has always raised difficulties. But, for a plain man in trouble about his soul, the passage from the Church doctrines and ordinances to St Paul's

<sup>1</sup> See a notable discourse delivered by the Rev. R. J. Campbell to the Lancashire Congregational Union, in the Free Trade Hall, 12th March 1907.

declaration of salvation by faith, as, for instance, in Rom. iii., was like the issue from a gloomy, tangled forest into a smooth, sunny, verdant glade sparkling with living waters. In any case, whether we believe in supernatural revelation or not, the contrast between the utterances which the common people have always heard gladly and the muffled conventionalisms in which all organised religions tend to get themselves wrapped up is apparent enough.

Traditional ecclesiasticism assumed perhaps its most attractive form in the mission of Augustine to the pagan English as recorded by the Venerable Bede.<sup>1</sup> And the date of that mission, close on the end of the sixth century, makes it convenient as our next illustration of the relations of the Bible and the people. True, the story itself, as told by perhaps the most lovable of ecclesiastical historians, belongs as literature to the age of Charlemagne, which we have left behind. But we are concerned not so much with Bede's conception of the event, as with his related facts, which, notwithstanding his tendency to pious credulity, there seems only occasional reason to doubt.

Could anything be less like the advent of St Paul to Philippi, for instance, than the pomp of Augustine's landing with his silver cross as a standard, and his sacred picture majestically borne, and his attendant monks with their sounding chant? Not that there is anything to condemn in the innocent arts of Augustine, for he came not only as the herald of a heavenly king, but also as an envoy of that king's vicegerent on earth. And as Ethelbert's consort was a Frankish Christian, the mis-

<sup>1</sup> We ought, of course, to write "Bæda." But later custom has too strongly established the form in which English affection cherishes the name.



sionary no doubt did perfectly right to maintain the worldly dignity of the queen's religion in the sight of her husband and his men. But we learn absolutely nothing of what Augustine said concerning his gospel in the discourse delivered, apparently through a Frankish interpreter. Queen Bertha may very well have understood him, but, whatever were her familiar explanations in private, the obstacle of an interpreter at the diplomatic meeting must have greatly marred Augustine's eloquence as a preacher. True, the king understood something of the present and future blessings promised as a reward of conversion, and said the words were good, while the conservatism of his future race was presaged in his plea for ancient custom.

But the impression we get is not at all such as is made by the behaviour and language of St Paul's hearers whose consciences were pricked, or whose fears of a world catastrophe were aroused. What we gather from Bede's story is rather that the king considered himself to have received a diplomatic proposal, attractive in many respects from the advantages it offered, but threatening considerable difficulties on account of the serious breach it involved with the ancient usages of his race. That Augustine mentioned sin and judgment, a new birth by baptism, the privileges of the Church, and the promise of heaven, we may take as certain. But the whole succeeding context suggests that it was the Church and not the Bible, or even the written Gospel, with which the exhortations of the preacher and the dubitation of the hearer were concerned.

Of course, this prominence of the Church rather than of the Bible, cannot even by the most scriptural Protestant—if the phrase may be allowed for the moment—be

made a fault in Augustine. For he could not help himself. His whole baggage probably did not contain more of the Bible than the passages incorporated with Church services. And if it be said that St Paul was in even worse case, because, when he set out on his missions, not a word of the New Testament had been written, we must remember that not only was his memory stored with almost the whole text of the old Scriptures, but he found the sacred book in every synagogue; and not only the Jews of the dispersion, but innumerable Gentile proselytes or half-proselytes were familiar with the Greek version of the Seventy. His preaching, therefore, except in the doubtful case of Athens,<sup>1</sup> was always predominantly scriptural, because the Septuagint was his mainstay. He spurned the idea of *any authority* in the Apostolic Church,<sup>2</sup> at least over *him*. But through the necessity of the case, not the Bible, but the Church, was Augustine's mainstay, and guaranteed his commission.

The indirect relations of Man and the Bible in that age, and indeed in all ages from the apostolic time to the triumph of the printing press, are also illustrated by a curious saying of Bede at the beginning of his work, where, however, he is speaking of his own day.

“This land at the present time studies and confesses one and the same science of supreme truth and genuine majesty in the languages of five nations; that is, of the English, the Britons, the Scots, the Picts, and the Latins, in accordance

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<sup>1</sup> Doubtful, not only because of historical uncertainty, but because, if the outline of the discourse be authentic, it is ridiculous to suppose that his reference to coming judgment was huddled up in the few concluding words handed down to us. And if he offered any confirmation of his words, he must have referred to the Jewish oracles.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Galatians, and 2 Cor., *passim*.

with the number of the books in which the divine law was written,<sup>1</sup>—that science which, by meditation of the Scriptures, has become the common property of all other parts of the world.”

Whose was the “meditation of Scripture” which permeated as with a leaven so many nations? Certainly not that of the unlearned multitude, who did not so much as know what the Bible was, except that it was God’s charter to the Church. The meditation was that of popes, bishops, priests, and monks, who conveyed the truth to the multitude as the latter were able to receive it. And “the science of supreme truth,” “confessed in the five languages,” could not be the Bible, for only fragments of it had been translated; but it was the creeds and such expressions of obedience to the Church as had by means of “glosses” been made accessible to the vulgar.<sup>2</sup> Thus a devoted priest was able to exult that the knowledge of the Lord had already covered the earth, though he was well aware that the Bible was a sealed book to all but a small minority even of Christian men.

One other illustration I shall permit myself to take from this venerable father of the English Church. For it is truly a significant fact that in relating the futile conference between the Augustinians and the representative of the older British Church, he gives us no hint whatever of scriptural arguments adduced on the one side or on the other. Indeed, the subjects of contention seem to have been exclusively points of Church tradition and custom, on which even the latest books of the Canon

<sup>1</sup> The Pentateuch.

<sup>2</sup> The poetic rendering of Scripture story by Cædmon cannot have been in the mind of Bede when writing the above, for Cædmon’s poems were known only in one language.

could throw no light. Yet there was one exception. For, on the ancient controversy as to Easter Day, the Fourth Gospel might well have been quoted by the British, if, indeed, they were sufficiently familiar with it. But both sides were apparently so utterly wanting in scriptural proofs, that, according to Bede's account, Augustine had recourse to the desperate expedient of test by miracle, and actually triumphed by healing a sick man.<sup>1</sup>

The Britons were at once more rational and more truly religious when, being still unconvinced even by the miracle, they agreed to the suggestion of a venerable hermit, that they should be guided at their next meeting by the consistency or otherwise of Augustine's bearing with the ideal of Christian courtesy. It is not said that they had in mind St Paul's words : "In honour preferring one another," but certainly those words might have suggested the omen by which they now agreed to be guided. They arranged to let the Roman emissaries arrive and be seated first. If, then, on their appearance, Augustine should rise to receive his spiritual brethren with the courtesy of a Christian gentleman, they agreed to consider the sign favourable, and to renew the conference with a hope of agreement. But Augustine, with incredible fatuity, remained seated in haughty assumption of spiritual lordship ; whereupon the Britons hardened their hearts and the schism remained unhealed.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Aliquis æger*. We may suspect the blindness ; otherwise the story may very well be true. Many forms of disease would yield to the amazement and nervous excitement of such an experience.

<sup>2</sup> Whether the extinction of the primitive British Church is a matter for regret, I do not here consider. But I am unable to agree with the view held by some Protestants that it was pure in doctrine, and apostolic in its simplicity. See J. W. Willis Bund, *Celtic Church in Wales*.



The sixth and the fifth centuries afford no illustrations suitable to my purpose, until we come to the age of Ambrose and the great Augustine of Hippo. But it was during these times that large numbers of the Teutonic hordes, Lombards, Goths, and Vandals, became nominal adherents of the Church. That the work of Ulphilas had anything to do with this multitudinous conversion is simply incredible. His translation of the Gospels is an interesting fact. But it is impossible to suppose that it could reach the hands or the ears of more than an insignificant number of his own flock in Mætia ; and the adoption of the new religion by the hordes of various dialects who poured across the Danube, and descended from the Alps, is to be attributed to quite other causes.

These causes are well described by Milman in his *History of Latin Christianity*, and amongst them no mention is made of the Bible. The palaces, the courts of justice, the theatres and amphitheatres of the conquered Romans must have seemed to the simple barbarians the work of potent magicians. The great churches with their marble and gold adornments, imposing ceremonial, and enchanting music, would suggest the secret of such preternatural gifts. And if, notwithstanding the apparent devotion of the Romans to their God, he had withheld victory from their arms, surely it was because he was tired of their effeminate vices, and was ready to welcome purer and more valiant vassals. Christ became the Teutonic God of War, and in their devotion to the Cross these warriors profited even more than Constantine from the heavenly omen, *in hoc signo vinces*. I can well believe that many a stalwart soldier had, like Pepin, a heart susceptible to the pathetic scenes portrayed in

the Gospel. But that the reading and exposition of Scripture played any such part in the conversion of these northern hordes as it does now, in the reports of missionary operations among modern heathen, is an idea utterly incongruous with the records of the times.

## CHAPTER V

### THE BIBLE IN THE CHURCH'S SILVER AGE

WHEN we get back to the centuries of the great preachers of the Church's silver age, we find the Bible holding a position much more akin to that with which we were familiar in the nineteenth century than was at all possible during the Middle and Darkest Ages. More akin, I say, but not identical, or even very similar. For it was not in the hands of the unlearned, nor did it take such a place in the education of even Christian children as it did in later times.<sup>1</sup> For even the great Augustine, the son of a saintly mother's vows and prayers, knew, as a boy, little if anything of the Scriptures, except that the New Testament was written in very inferior Greek, and the Old Testament version in even worse Latin. Yet during the fifth and the fourth centuries the Bible was constantly the subject of popular expositions to large audiences. And if the laity could not easily obtain copies, or even could not read, at any rate they heard the entire text of large parts of the Bible read by the expositor in the

<sup>1</sup> The case of Timothy is not in point. Not only does it belong to another age, but though his father is said to have been a Greek, his mother evidently followed her Jewish traditions in teaching her boy the Old Testament.

course of his exposition. Thus in the last book of *The City of God*,<sup>1</sup> Augustine attributes popular familiarity with the miracles of Scripture to the practice of the Church in prescribing the public reading of the canonical books. This, he says, fixed the facts firmly in the memory of the common people. A passage also in his expositions of St John suggests that those who could read sometimes read aloud in private to those who could not.<sup>2</sup> The importance thus given to the Bible and to "the ministry of the Word" in that age receives most interesting illustration from Augustine's own account of his conversion under the combined influence of the preaching of Ambrose and his own reading. To a considerable extent the thrilling story anticipates the experience of many a modern sinner and unbeliever, who, between an earnest, powerful preacher and an open Bible, is gradually brought to his knees and finds salvation.

Yet the differences are obvious, though they are too often overlooked by those who suppose that precisely in proportion as we approach Christian origins the predominance of the Bible increases. For, to Augustine, as to Bede, the Church came before the Bible, inasmuch as it was upon the authority of the Church that the Bible was received.<sup>3</sup> And the reiterated and emphatic employ-

<sup>1</sup> Lib. xxii., cap. viii. The puerilities which follow do not here concern us. "Leguntur quippe in populis ut credantur." The words do not distinctly mention reading in the church, but the whole context implies it.

<sup>2</sup> On the Gospel of St John, Tract. cxii. He is referring to his own work on the harmony of the Gospels. But the practice must certainly have included the Gospels themselves.

<sup>3</sup> "Sed me non sinebas aliis fluctibus cogitationis auferri ab ea fide, qua credebam et esse te, et esse incommutabilem substantiam tuam, et esse de hominibus curam et iudicium tuum, et in Christo, filio tuo, domino nostro, atque scripturis sanctis, quas ecclesiæ tuæ catholicæ commendaret



ment of the epithet "catholic," where no spiritual universalism can possibly be meant, shows that Augustine was a firm believer in the theory of a church supernaturally founded by Jesus upon the delegated authority of the apostles, and guaranteed against any real schism by the ever-immanent Holy Spirit, to whose presence and gifts no schismatic congregation could make any but a blasphemous claim. In a word, the Church in Augustine's conception of Christianity had, altogether apart from the Bible, a position and supremacy which to the nineteenth century Bible Christian had become inconceivable.

Further, the sacramentalism of Augustine's religion widely separates it from simple Bible religion as taught in the last century. Both, indeed, belong to those Oriental religions of which Dr J. G. Frazer says that they "inculcated the communion of the soul with God and its eternal salvation as the only objects worth living for: objects in comparison with which the prosperity and even the existence of the State sank into insignificance."<sup>1</sup> But the methods of salvation were different. For, to the modern evangelical Protestant, salvation by faith has been quite independent of the Church, except so far as faith may come by hearing. But, to Augustine, faith could only be realised and acted out by baptism and obedience to the Church. Indeed, though in Augustine's account of his conversion there is much said about his sins, in regard to which he betrays some strange ideas

autoritas, viam et posuisse salutis humanæ ad eam vitam quæ post hanc mortalem futura est." The reference to Christ in conjunction with the Scripture makes no difference to Augustine's doctrine of Church authority. For all that was known of Christ, whether by Scripture or tradition, depended for its validity on that authority. No modern Bible man, say a Spurgeon or a Moody, would have written so.

<sup>1</sup> *Isis, Attis, and Osiris*, p. 194.

of moral proportion,<sup>1</sup> and though it would be totally unjust to minimise his desire for moral regeneration, yet his *Confessions* obviously suggest that the misbeliefs of his youth and adolescence oppressed his conscience more than lying, selfishness, or impurity. His aspiration after communion with God is not at all out of harmony with the most spiritual forms of religion in later days, or with its prophetic instinct of the future.<sup>2</sup> But for Augustine one essential condition of communion with God was union with the Church, access to her sacraments, and obedience to her behests. Now this kind of Christianity is practically identical with that of the Greek and Roman and Anglican Churches. But to such as accept the pass-word "the Bible and the Bible alone," it is entirely alien. The idea, therefore, that the emergence of the Bible in the nineteenth century was simply its restoration to the place it had occupied in the times before the spiritual empire of the Pope, finds no justification in Augustine's treatment of the sacred book. His expositions are sometimes noble, occasionally sublime, but often also trivial and even puerile. But whatever

<sup>1</sup> *E.g.*, his lying and discourtesy to his mother, when he deserted her under false pretences on the quay at Carthage, evidently does not weigh upon his conscience nearly so much as his early Manichæism. The fate of his apparently gifted illegitimate son did not seem to grieve him so keenly as the loss of a friend. Even when he began to feel the influence of Ambrose, he heartlessly separated from his faithful concubine, with the view of an advantageous marriage; and then, as the intended bride was of pre-nuptial age, he could not endure to be without a mistress, but must, temporarily, supply the place of the discarded woman. Besides, amid all the mourning over his own soul's pollution, there is not, so far as I remember, a word of pity for the woman, or regret for the dishonour done to womanhood. Of course, such defective morality is characteristic, not so much of the man, as of the social standard of his ecclesiastical surroundings. But that is precisely my point.

<sup>2</sup> See, for instance, Spinoza on "The Intellectual Love of God," *Ethics*, Part V.

their character, they always imply the supremacy of the Church, and the supernatural efficacy of sacraments, and are therefore totally inconsistent with the Bible Protestantism of a later day.

If I recall likewise the relics of paganism surviving in the religion of Augustine and his mother Monica, this is not so much with the idea of emphasising the difference between their Christianity and that of the nineteenth century—for indeed paganism, in the form of fetishism, is with us still—but rather for the purpose of helping us to realise the actual mental and spiritual atmosphere to which the piety of Monica and the expositions of Augustine were adapted: Of the former we are told by her son that in Africa she was in the habit of depositing offerings of food and wine at the tombs of saints and martyrs. But when she followed her son to Milan, Ambrose objected to the practice, partly because it was sometimes made an excuse for excessive drinking, and partly because it too closely resembled the pagan *parentalia*.<sup>1</sup> Augustine praises her for the readiness with which she submitted to the authority of the Church ; but there is no mention of any appeal to Scripture in condemnation of the practice. It is remarkable, however, that in Africa she had made these offerings for many years without rebuke ; and her evident unconsciousness of doing anything unusual among Christians, justifies the inference that the heathen observance was the subject of episcopal connivance, if not approval. Yet it is obvious that the state of mind to which offerings of food and drink to the

<sup>1</sup> See J. G. Frazer's *Adonis, Attis, and Osiris*, pp. 240, etc., for the universality of the custom. We are not told whether Monica made her offerings at the season of the Parentalia or on the anniversary of each saint's death. But the former is more likely, if we may argue from the reasons given by Ambrose for his objection.

dead seemed appropriate, must have been still largely pagan.

Augustine himself, when he came under the influence of Ambrose, had so recently emerged from Manichæism, that, if my notion of the origin of this heresy be correct, there is little wonder that relics of paganism attached themselves to his religion. Now, his thrilling story of his spiritual conflict in a garden with the powers of darkness within him, reaches its climax in a resort to the entirely pagan expedient of *sortes biblicæ*, book omens, obtained by opening at random the pages of the volume consulted, and reading the first words that met the eye.<sup>1</sup> As is well known, the Homeric books had often been used by pagans for the same purpose. And though Augustine justifies his action by the example of holy Antony, with whose story he had quite recently become acquainted, yet the practice of divination involved is distinctly heathen. Nor is that fact at all invalidated by the continuance of the custom even into Protestant times.

It is curious that Augustine, when in his agony he heard the shrill voice in the neighbouring garden repeating *tolle, lege*—"Take it up and read," should only have tried to remember whether such words were used in any children's game. The customs of African schoolmasters must have been very different from those of other regions and times if he had not often heard them thundered in the ears of his childhood. We have heard them ourselves long ago, though perhaps in a different form—"Turn it up, turn it up!"—when our rendering

<sup>1</sup> According to Tischendorf, the ancient volumina or rolls had been changed to paged books, with several columns on a page, before the third century A.D. The book of the "Apostle," which Augustine opened on the garden seat where Alypius was sitting, was, no doubt, a paged book.



did not agree with lexicon authority. But, however that may be, the child's voice mimicking a schoolmaster's orders, sent Augustine back to where he had left the sacred book on the bench on which his friend was sitting. The book, be it observed, was neither the Bible nor the New Testament, but the "Apostle"; that is, presumably, the collection of St Paul's Epistles, possibly also including the Acts. Augustine opened the book at haphazard, and, glancing at the first words, read: "Not in rioting and drunkenness, not in chambering and wantonness, not in strife and envying: but put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make not provision for the flesh, to fulfil the lusts thereof" (Rom. xiii. 13, 14).

But the relics of paganism in Augustine were more deeply rooted than could be inferred from the mere habit of divination. And as in this respect he was eminently representative of the Church in his day, a short examination of his most characteristic pagan traditions may help us to estimate the immensity of the change that has been evolved in the relations of Church and Bible since his time. Notwithstanding the vein of mysticism constantly recurrent in the vast deposit of his writings, it is clear that when Augustine finally abandoned Manichæism he reverted to the "Weltanschauung"—or world-idea—common to pagans and Jews alike. And when I say "to pagans and Jews," I do not for a moment forget that the monotheism shared by the later Jews with some pre-Christian heathen philosophers, enabled them to give a greater dignity to the conception of a world-creation than had been compatible with earlier mythology. But the three-storied structure—comprising heaven, earth, and hell, or Hades or Sheol—was practically identical in the everyday thoughts

of Jew and pagan alike. It was, however, much more pagan than Jewish, since it was immeasurably older than the compilation of the Mosaic myths. Indeed, it was a conception inevitable, so long as men's experience was bounded by firmament, earth-plain, night, and dreams.

Now Augustine, on surrendering Manichæism, embraced his mother's belief that this limited experience of man had been enlarged by supernatural revelation; and the fundamental, or at any rate the initial fact revealed, was that "in the beginning God created the heaven and the earth." Notwithstanding his subtle speculations about the metaphysics of creation, he did not deny the interpretation put upon it by the writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews: "Through faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God, so that things which are seen were not made of things which do appear." In other phrase, heaven, the earth-plain, and Hades were at a definite period called into existence by the fiat of an indefinite personal Being entirely and essentially distinct from the worlds he made, a Being henceforward related to those worlds as a supreme despotic sovereign is to the realms he owns. Let it be granted that the idea of fatherhood, superposed even by pagans<sup>1</sup> on this notion of a divine despotism, was enlarged and refined and arrayed in many attributes of tenderness by the genius of Christianity. Still the divine imperialism underlay it, a sovereignty acting by personal will, adapting its decrees to changing times, and much more drastic than any earthly kingship, in that it was omniscient and marked for judgment not only the outward behaviour of

<sup>1</sup> As recognised in the speech attributed to St Paul on Mars hill, Acts xvii.

every individual subject, but his inmost thoughts and most secret motions.

To such a limited conception of the immeasurable universe and its government the Augustinian and Middle Age theory of Church and Bible, though in one aspect supernatural, was in another sense eminently natural. For it was in the highest degree unlikely that the personal sovereign who ruled such a finite domain should have left his subjects without any knowledge of himself or any directions as to their duty towards him. The Church, therefore, and the Bible filled an obvious gap in the scheme of things. For the Church was a continuation of the revelation consummated in the person of the Supreme Sovereign's incarnate Son ; and the Scriptures were collectively the Church's sacred charter dictated by the Spirit to holy men of old. But the authority of this charter lay in the witness borne to it by the Church, which had, from time to time, guaranteed the divinity of each book or collection of books as it appeared. And only the same competent and indispensable witness could give authoritative interpretation to the words of the Book.

Readers of Augustine sometimes wonder how a man of the intellectual strength shown by the design, and, with some obvious exceptions, by the details of his *City of God*, could have descended to the credulity and puerility characteristic of his references to contemporary miracles, and of his distortions of Scripture for the sake of a feeble and uninteresting symbolism. The same man who, in opening his lectures on St John, described that apostle's inspiration by one of the most majestic metaphors in all literature, could stop beneath the very shadow of the Cross, as he approached the conclusion of his course, to note that the reed used by the executioners

to lift the vinegar to the lips of Jesus, was a mystic symbol of the Scriptures. I shall venture to put the passages side by side, for the comparison speaks volumes. At the portals of the Gospel, then, he says :—

“This John, dear brethren, was of those mountains concerning which it is written, ‘Let the mountains receive peace for thy people, and the hills righteousness.’ The mountains are exalted souls ; the hills are lesser souls. But to this end do the mountains receive peace, that the hills may receive righteousness. What is the righteousness that the hills receive? Faith ; because the righteous doth live by faith. But the lesser souls would not receive faith unless the grander souls, called ‘mountains,’ were illuminated by the eternal wisdom itself (*ab ipsa Sapientia*), in order that they may transmit to little ones what little ones may be able to receive, so that the hills dwell in confidence<sup>1</sup> because the mountains receive peace. . . . Thus, then, my brethren, John was of these mountains. . . . He lived in contemplation of the divinity of the Word. How glorious was this mountain, how exalted ! He had risen above all the summits of the world ; he had soared above all the fields of air ; he had transcended even the very stars ; he had passed beyond the choirs and legions of angels. For unless he had risen above all things created, he could not have attained to him by whom all things were made. . . .”

Perhaps a less spiritual orator, more intent on his own eloquence than on his subject, would have forced the suggested mountain scene more definitely upon his hearers. With Augustine the image served his purpose and dissolved away. But we may please ourselves by remembering Alpine scenes, where a snowy dome touching the sky gathers the light of heaven about itself to

<sup>1</sup> This is not a literal rendering of *vivere ex fide colles*, but it gives the suggestive picture.



reflect it far and wide, and receives the waters of the firmament to send them singing round the lower hills on which are grouped the villages receiving in those waters from the sky both purity and life. In strange contrast to this poetic and pregnant metaphor we find the following in the exposition of John xix. 29 :—

“The mode in which the sponge could be applied to his lips when he was lifted on the Cross high above the ground need not concern us. For, as we read in other Evangelists, though our author has omitted the fact, it was by means of a reed that this drink contained in the sponge was lifted to the upper part of the Cross. Now, by the reed was symbolised the Scripture which was fulfilled by this action. For just as we speak of the Greek or Latin *tongue*, or any other mode of speech produced by the tongue, so a reed (pen) may be spoken of as though it were the letter which is written by the reed. I admit <sup>1</sup> that with us it is a familiar and recognised habit to speak of articulate utterances of the human voice as “tongues.” <sup>2</sup> Still, just in proportion as it is contrary to custom to speak of Scripture as a reed, in that proportion is the expression here the more (obviously) mystical and symbolic.”

In the following sentences Augustine refers to the incident as the last item in the fulfilment of prophecy required before the death of Jesus :—“Then because nothing remained, which must needs be accomplished before he died . . . he bowed his head and gave up the ghost.” We are thus told to believe that the divine hero of the sacred tragedy was consciously calculating in his last moments how many ancient predictions remained

<sup>1</sup> This is practically the force of *sed* here, “I know what you would say, etc.”

<sup>2</sup> Understand, “while the reed as an expression for a written word is unknown.”

to be justified, and being sure that this was the last, he cried, "It is finished." It would be hard to find in the pages of mocking unbelievers a more cruel travesty of an event that has held the world in awe.<sup>1</sup>

How are we to account for such amazing inconsistencies of thought and feeling? It may be said that in his greater utterances Augustine followed his own genius or inspiration, while in his puerilities he spoke the ecclesiastical dialect of the time. Now, if this be the explanation—as I am disposed to think it is—it affords an instructive illustration of the relations of the Bible and the Church, not only in the fifth and sixth centuries, but in all the centuries until the myth of creation began to dissolve away under historical and scientific criticism. The contemplations of the great Churchman, *so far as he felt and submitted to the dominion of the Church*, were limited to the finite realm, heaven, earth, and hell, of which a god, conceived on human analogies, was the absolute, autocratic, immediate sovereign. This sovereign *must* have revealed himself—so it was assumed; and if so, that revelation

<sup>1</sup> Augustine's whole treatment of the Johannine narrative of the death of Jesus is in miserably disappointing contrast with the nobility of his introductory lecture on the Gospel. It is almost universally admitted now that the Fourth Gospel is of unknown authorship, and was related to the actual facts somewhat as the imaginations of the Greek tragedians were to the germ of popular tradition out of which genius evoked them. And indeed, in the brief, self-restrained picture given by this Gospel of the Crucifixion, with some touches of suppressed passion, there seems to me to be a sort of Æschylean grandeur—the solitary figure of a suffering God projected against infinite mystery. But, in dealing with that picture, Augustine appears to be most interested in reconciling "the third hour" of Mark with "the sixth hour" of his text, and in the precise truth about the division of the garments, and such-like "vacant chaff." Again, there is downright bathos—and of any modern man we should say irreverence—in his connection of Eph. iii. 18 with the material Cross. The cross-bar represents "the breadth" and the upright beam "the height" of the love of Christ!

could be no other than the Judæo-Christian Scriptures and tradition. Granting this, it followed that every part of the Scripture dictated by the Holy Ghost must be instinct with divine meaning. And if there is anything in the sacred writings apparently opposed to morality or common sense, that can only be because the questionable passage deals with mysteries only to be understood through symbolic interpretation.<sup>1</sup>

Further, since the plan of salvation involved a series of prophecies and types hinting with gradually increasing plainness at the ultimate theophany, every devout and instructed student of the Word was always on the look-out for a significance deeper than the obvious sense. And again, since God had miraculously intervened to repair a breach made in his world by the craft and subtilty of the Devil, and had kept up that miraculous intervention for more than four thousand years, it was contrary to the analogy of faith to suppose that he would suspend that miraculous intervention for the short period that remained before the consummation of all things. Under such a system of thought, we can hardly wonder that even an Augustine often lapsed into holy folly.

It remains to add to these considerations the curious mixture of materialism and mysticism characteristic of the sacramental ideas of Augustine, of his contemporaries, and of all his followers. The water of baptism was a material substance, but in the hands of the priest it possessed miraculous powers. The candidate emerged

<sup>1</sup> See, if anyone cares, *De Doctrina Christiana*, Lib. vi., cap. 21, where Augustine quotes with evident approval Cyprian's edifying reference to Noah's conduct after he had planted a vineyard. It is true that Augustine quotes it in illustration of a point in his teaching on Christian rhetoric, but the recital of such words by two great fathers amply justifies the above.

from it as one born again. All his sins were cancelled. The natural man had become the child of God, and an inheritor of the kingdom of heaven. It may be possible, perhaps, for ingenuity so to explain Augustine's allusions to the supreme rite of the Church, "holy communion," as to exclude the metaphysical doctrine of transubstantiation. But that he believed the real body and blood of Jesus to be in some sense present after consecration, seems undeniable.

Now, such sacramental magic is utterly incongruous with the probabilities of Christian origins as suggested by historical criticism. For if we put aside the Fourth Gospel as clearly post-apostolic and ideal, and if we confine ourselves to such epistles and to such portions of the Synoptical Gospels as seem proved to have been circulated in the infant church during the latter part of the first century, we get the idea of a spiritualised, semi-Jewish community, separated from the traditions of Israel by a renunciation of the Mosaic law, but insisting on the consummation of those traditions in a Messiah who had been crucified, but had conquered death by rising again and ascending into heaven, whence he was shortly to come down and establish God's kingdom on earth. The preparation of the Christian for that re-appearance was to be a pure and loving life, not according to any literal commandment, but by the inspiration vouchsafed to faith. To this pure and loving life baptism was the initial rite, and the Lord who was to come from heaven was to be constantly kept in mind by a commemorative meal such as he had ministered to his apostles in the hour of their last social communion with him.

How did it come to pass, then, that a religion and rites so simple as these received and appropriated a



sacramental magic such as made baptism the means of a supernatural metamorphosis, and the Lord's Supper a viaticum to immortal life? Opinions differ; but there seems to be a weight of probability on the side of those who hold that, in the course of the second and third centuries, the pagan "mysteries," whose rites often show a curious analogy to those of the Church, had exerted considerable influence on the latter. The whole Western world was at that period almost morbidly sensitive to the problems of human destiny, and to the possibility of redemption from sin; while the longing for an assurance of immortality had never before, at least in Roman society, assumed the passionate forms that it did then.<sup>1</sup> Now, the class of people who sought initiation in the mysteries, which promised satisfaction to this vague longing and perturbation of spirit, were precisely such as to find at once a superior attraction in Christianity, when once they were introduced to its doctrine and worship. And as such proselytes increased in number, it was inevitable that their reminiscences, together with the tendency of the times, should introduce an element of heathen magic into the sacraments of the Church.

But this kind of sacramentalism made impossible the sort of isolated supremacy claimed for the Bible in the nineteenth century by the popular Protestant voice, as rightly interpreted by the Bible Society. The fourth century was an age of great preachers, whose industry and zeal in the public exposition of the Scriptures familiarised large numbers of the laity with Hebrew mythology, Gospel traditions, and apostolic exhortations. To this extent we may regard the popular Bible habit of

<sup>1</sup> See *Das antike Mysterienwesen in seinem Einfluss auf das Christenthum*, by Gustav Aurich, 1894.

that age as more nearly akin to the feeling of the recent century than to that of the Middle Ages. Yet, after all, it was but distantly akin. For if any layman dared to interpret the Bible for himself, he was in danger of the fate of the later Paulicians; while the dread authority of the Church, the relics of paganism incorporated with Christianity, and the magic imported into the sacraments, constituted a spiritual atmosphere in which a nineteenth-century believer in "simple Bible religion" could not have breathed.

One of the great preachers above alluded to was John Chrysostom—John of the Golden Mouth—a presbyter of Antioch in the last quarter of the fourth century, and afterwards (398) Patriarch of Constantinople. Born about A.D. 347, of good family, in Cœlesyria, he became a pupil of Libanius the rhetorician, called also the sophist, and he was likewise a hearer of Andragathias, a philosopher. His parents intended him for the profession of law; but his conscience revolted against the "knaveish and unjust"<sup>1</sup> practices of the courts, and he was seized with a craving for the contemplative life to which a fellow-student, Evagrius, had devoted himself. He was, however, diverted from this solitude by the enthusiasm kindled in him for the study of the Bible.<sup>2</sup> It is noteworthy that, for the better pursuit of this study, he seems to have considered the social life of the episcopal city of Antioch,

<sup>1</sup> "τὸν ἐν τοῖς δικαστηρίοις μοχθήρον καὶ ἄδικον βίον," Socr., *Eccl. Hist.*, vi. 3.

<sup>2</sup> It is not clear whether his parents were Christians or not. At the time of his birth the political establishment of Christianity was so recent that almost half the population, or—considering the large population in rural districts (*paganî*)—more than half adhered to heathen beliefs and practices, or were guided in their religious profession by expediency. I do not know of any proof that Anthusa, like Monica, desired to see her son a priest or bishop.

and assiduous attendances on the services of the Church, to be more advantageous than the retirement of a hermit. At the same time he lived the life of an ascetic, a self-discipline to which he adhered throughout his life. Such zeal in a young man of his social position and intellectual gifts soon attracted attention, and Bishop Zeno of Antioch ordained him to the office of Reader. The function seems to have been first formally recognised in the third century, and perhaps implies a need which could scarcely be felt until after the completion of the New Testament Canon. It was a humble ecclesiastical office, below that of deacon ; but it must not be confounded with that of lay-reader in the modern Church. Copies of the Scriptures being scarce, even in episcopal towns, and the number of illiterate people being large, it was important that frequent opportunities should be afforded of hearing the Bible read aloud in church, apart from the more formal rites. The absence or obscurity of such an office in the mediæval Church, apart from the monasteries, is an indication of the different place held by the Bible in the two periods.

It is natural to conjecture that such gifts as those of a musical voice, clear enunciation, instinctive modulation, and the nameless charm which quickens sympathy would quickly be recognised in the reading of a born orator. At any rate he soon obtained deacon's orders. One of the too frequent wrangles which marred the work of the Church in those days, as in modern times, delayed his advancement. It is unnecessary here to particularise the quarrels of Meletius, Gregory of Nazianzen, and Paulinus. During the trouble, John withdrew himself for three years into solitude, used no doubt for reading, meditation, prayer, and authorship. At the end of that time his

former friend and model succeeded to the bishopric of Antioch, and speedily ordained John as priest or presbyter. He had already written several treatises, but as the Preacher of the Golden Mouth he was yet unknown.

Aptitude and opportunity, those two essential conditions of any great, or indeed of any successful career, were, in the case of Chrysostom, like two chemical elements which rush together with flame and resounding report. As presbyter he was called upon to preach; and as soon as the people heard him, they cared for no one else. They flocked in such numbers that he was obliged to make an innovation in Church custom. For the preacher seems usually to have stood on the altar steps, as indeed is often the practice of Catholic priests now. But there was placed in the body of the church an "ascent" or "ambo,"<sup>1</sup> being a platform with steps on either side. It had been used hitherto for confessions of faith, for the reading of the Gospel and Epistle, likewise as a stand for singers, and for any purpose requiring easy command of the whole area of the church. If it be true that it was not used by preachers in earlier times, the inference is that the preacher did not require to command the whole area, inasmuch as it was not usually filled with people. But the throng, pressing to hear the new preacher, was such, that if all were to see and hear, he must occupy a more elevated position, and the ambo served his purpose.

His removal to Constantinople and elevation to the archiepiscopal see was caused by the impression his eloquence made on a very unworthy man—Eutropius, the eunuch minister of the weak Arcadius. For, being on a visit to Antioch, Eutropius heard the "Golden Mouth," as he began to be called, and immediately determined that

<sup>1</sup> Said to be derived from ἀναβαίνω.



this was the man for the first vacancy on the archiepiscopal throne. It might be curious, but it would be hopeless, to speculate on the motives that could have actuated an unprincipled, corrupt, debased, and utterly wicked man to desire for the chief pulpit of the world a preacher of such intense moral earnestness and of such fearless and incisive utterance as characterised Chrysostom. But he was destined to be within little more than a year the occasion and the subject of, perhaps, the most extraordinary display of pulpit oratory that the Church has ever known. The scene was dramatic. Eutropius, the victim of popular revolution and Imperial caprice or cowardice, had fled to the church as a sanctuary, and was seen as the congregation assembled to be grovelling at the altar and clinging to its pillars. The Archbishop ascended the steps of the ambo, and gazing at the prostrate figure, pronounced his text, "Vanity of vanities, all is vanity." Then, without exordium, he made the application at once.

"Where now," he cried, "are the splendid robes of the consulate? Where are the flaring torches? Where are the applauding crowd, and the feasts and the assemblies, and the wreaths and the pavilions? Where are the shouts of the mob, and the welcome of the circus, and the flatteries of the spectators? All have vanished. A stormy blast scattered the foliage; it exposed to us the naked trunk: and even that is left shaken from the roots. For so mighty has been the sweep of the wind, that the tree is all but torn up, and its root fibres are quivering. Where now are the pretended friends? Where are the wine-parties and the dinners? Where is the swarm of parasites, with wine-bibbing throughout the day, and the fantastic arts of the cooks, and the hangers-on of power, who act and speak only to curry favour? All those things were a dream, and when

the day came they were nought. They were flowers of the spring, and when the spring passed they withered. They were a shadow, and it fled. They were smoke, and it dissolved. They were bubbles, and they burst. They were a spider's web, and it was torn to threads. Wherefore let us chant ever again and again this spiritual utterance, 'Vanity of vanities, all is vanity.' For this utterance ought always to be inscribed on our walls, on our garments, in the market-place, in the home, in the streets, on our doors, in our entrance-halls, and, above all, in the conscience of each man."

After a while, turning to the miserable fugitive, the unsparing preacher, with an apparent cruelty afterwards explained, reproached him :—

"Did I not tell thee often and often that wealth is fugitive? But thou wouldst not endure us. Did I not tell thee that it is a senseless<sup>1</sup> servant? But thou wouldst not be persuaded. See now, how actual facts have proved to experience that wealth is not merely fugitive, not merely senseless, but murderous. For it is that wealth which has brought thee to this abject terror. When thou usedst often to complain of me for telling thee the truth, did I not tell thee that I love thee more than thy flatterers do? that I, the reprover, care for thee more than those who fawn on thee? Did I not also remind you that the wounds (inflicted) by friends are more faithful than the obtruded kisses of enemies.<sup>2</sup> If thou hadst endured my wounding, their kisses would not have brought thee to this death.

"If I speak thus, it is not through any desire to trample on that prostrate man, but through the wish to confirm those

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<sup>1</sup> ἀγνώμων. Perhaps "unprofitable" might translate it, but the emphasis is on the brute stupidity of mere money.

<sup>2</sup> Prov. xxvii. 6. Chrysostom gives the LXX version. The kisses are there called ἐκουσία, — offered without being asked.

who stand ; not to inflame the wounds of the sufferer, do I speak, but to preserve in sound health those who are not yet hurt ; not to sink a man struggling in the waves, but to warn those sailing with a fair wind, lest they too should founder. How can that be prevented ? Why, by giving careful heed to the mutability of human affairs. For if this man had been on his guard against a reverse, he would not have sustained a reverse. But though he would not profit by private influences or by any other, surely you, who plume yourselves on your wealth, may profit by his fate ; for there is nothing in all things human that is more precarious.

“ Let any rich man enter here and win great profit. For when he sees one who has shaken the whole world, cast down from so high a pinnacle, now crouching in fear, more terrified than a hare or a frog, and fastened to that pillar without bands, fixed by fear instead of chains, he will abate his pretence, he will drop his pompous assumption, and, reflecting on the true philosophy of things human, he will go away, having learned by an object lesson what the Scriptures tell him in words, that ‘ All flesh is grass, and all the glory of man as the flower of grass. The grass is withered and the flower is faded.’ Or again : ‘ As the grass they shall quickly wither, and as the green herb they shall fall away ; because as smoke so are his days,’<sup>1</sup>—and many such passages. On the other hand, the poor man who comes in and looks upon this sight will have no pessimistic feeling about himself, nor will he bemoan his penury. Rather he will be pleased with his poverty, because it has been to him as a place of sanctuary, and as a waveless harbour, and as a secure wall of defence. And, seeing all this, if he hath the choice, he would a thousand times prefer

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<sup>1</sup> It is pretty certain that we have here the shorthand writer's report of a discourse delivered almost extempore. Hence we need not be surprised at the tacking of Ps. cii. 3 on to Ps. xxxvii. 2. As to shorthand reports of Chrysostom, see Socrates, *Hist. En.*, vi. 4.

to remain as he is, rather than to possess the world's wealth for a brief space of time, and then to be in jeopardy of his life. Seest thou how the flight of this man hither has been no small gain to rich and poor, to the lowly and the high, to bond and free? Seest thou how each several man, taking his own appropriate medicine, goes away from this spectacle healed?

"Ha! Do I soften your mood? Do I turn away wrath? Do I quench inhuman passion? Do I convert you to sympathy? Truly, I think so; for your faces show it, and the fountains of your tears. Come then, since the rock in you has become deep earth and soft soil, bring forth the fruit of pity; let the plant of sympathy ripen; let us fall before the sovereign, or rather let us beseech the all-pitying God to assuage the mood of the Emperor and to soften his heart, so that he may grant us unreservedly this grace. . . ."

The preacher then goes on to describe how the Imperial soldiery had sought permission to violate the sanctuary, and how Arcadius had pleaded with tears against the deed. He evidently thinks the popular passion is the real danger to the fugitive. Therefore, in immediate prospect of the Communion, he uses all priestly authority and oratorical art to ensure the relenting of the people.

"For how could you be fit for absolution if, when the injured monarch shows no vindictiveness, you, who have suffered nothing like so much, should persist in such wrath? Or how, when this congregation separates, will you touch the mysteries,<sup>1</sup> or utter that prayer which we are commanded to say, 'Forgive us as we forgive our debtors,' when at the same time you are extorting a penalty from your debtor?"

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<sup>1</sup> μυστηρίων = consecrated elements.



In the result, Eutropius was held inviolable within the church ; but having left it in the hope of escape, he was captured, and after a brief exile was recalled and put to death. But Chrysostom, in a sermon preached after the attempted escape and capture, declared that if he had remained within the sacred precincts, no harm could have touched him. And though the moral earnestness of the preacher is indisputable, yet it is clear that what he has most at heart is the inviolability of the Church.<sup>1</sup>

This incident in the career of Chrysostom has been selected for recital partly because its dramatic nature gives a vivid glimpse of Church life at the end of the fourth century, and partly because it illustrates what the Bible then was in the hands and on the lips of a Churchman with popular sympathies and power of expression. The gifts and arts of a successful preacher are much the same in all ages, and there is a good deal in Chrysostom that reminds us of Spurgeon or Ward Beecher, though he had undoubtedly more genius, more culture, and more learning than either of these. But there are two points of difference between his days and ours, which must always strike us in reading him. The first is the much more limited knowledge of the Bible possible to popular audiences in the fourth century, and the second is the universal acceptance by such audiences of the power of the Church as a supernatural body privileged to interpret its own charter in the Scriptures and to influence the eternal destinies of every man through its priests and sacraments. There were probably more copies of the Bible, or at any rate of the Gospels and Epistles, in Con-

<sup>1</sup> The discourse is somewhat incoherent, and the Benedictine editor expresses doubts of its genuineness, but the vindication of the Church is characteristic.

stantinople than in any other city of the world, except Rome. But Chrysostom found it necessary to exhort his hearers to get themselves the Scriptures,<sup>1</sup> "the medicine of the soul"; or, at any rate, if they cannot compass the entire Bible, they ought to have the "New Testament, the Acts of the Apostles, the Gospels, those perpetual teachers." It would be strange indeed to hear a popular preacher in St Paul's Cathedral nowadays urging an average audience to purchase a Bible, or at any rate part of one. It is not likely that any house-painter in Constantinople cherished a familiar Bible on which he scribbled independent comments after the fashion of the rude but fervent Christian whose original hermeneutics were quoted in our first chapter. Not because the Bible was less honoured in the fourth century than in the nineteenth, but it was honoured in a different fashion. It was like the Ark of the Covenant, not to be touched by profane hands; but, so far at least as its interpretation and application was concerned, to be left to the priests. At the same time it is pleasant to know that the lively and pointed expositions of Chrysostom were probably, at least in the case of some part of his hearers, revived and enforced by their own reading at home.

The power of the Church is a familiar topic in Catholic pulpits now, and such power as the Catholic clergy exercise over the uneducated multitude is largely owing to the

<sup>1</sup> βιβλία. It is one of the earliest uses of the word in that special sense in *Ep. ad Coll. Hom.*, ix. In the following context is an eloquent commendation of the practice of private Bible-reading. "Do not throw the whole work on us. You are sheep; yes, but not unreasoning sheep! You have reason." This undoubtedly shows that under Chrysostom the Church did not withhold the Scriptures, as it seems to have done in the seventh century, according to the Paulician accusation (see *ante*, p. 109), but it is perfectly consistent with what is said above as to the impossibility of independent interpretation.

implicit belief of the faithful in the awful consequences attached to the priest's sacramental prerogatives. But it is questionable whether, even in a Catholic country, such a scene would be possible as that which we have just witnessed in the Church of St Sophia. For, though the pretensions of the Church to absolve or to refuse absolution from damning sin are maintained, no one believes in those pretensions with such thoroughness as to accept the inevitable inference that the destinies of eternity must supersede the expediencies of time, and that the Church must overrule the State. Needless to say that outside the Catholic Church the most sincere and fervent Christians have no feelings even remotely akin to the reverence and awe with which Chrysostom's congregation listened to his exaltation of the Church's delegated divine powers. They are Bible Christians, even if they do not usurp the title as a sectarian name. Keeping to the limits of the nineteenth century, before the "New Theology" had become popular, we may say that each worshipper in Protestant churches carried his Bible about with him, not as a corporate, but as a personal charter of redemption and eternal life. Between his soul and God no priest might intervene. Between his understanding or conscience and the Bible, no earthly interpreter had authority to intrude. Advice, information, explanation might be offered and thankfully received, but the only authoritative interpreter recognised by the pious was the same Spirit who moved holy men of old to write the books. Such a relation of Man to the Bible was not only unknown, but inconceivable, in the silver age of the Church.

## CHAPTER VI

### THE BIBLE AND PRIMITIVE CHRISTIANITY

THE purpose of this treatise requires us constantly to keep in view those popular ideas of the Bible which reached their culmination in the nineteenth century. Such ideas are now in process of change, a process which some call development, and others disintegration. But probably the interpretations are not irreconcilable. However that may be, it is certain that, according to the popular Protestant evangelical theory of Christian origins and early progress, it is precisely as we approach the apostolic age that the supremacy of Scripture emerges from the mists of later superstition, and that the virgin Church is heard to anticipate the later Protestant watchword, "the Bible, and the Bible alone." But this popular idea of early Church life is scarcely confirmed by a candid study of such documents as are left to us by the internecine struggle between sects for the preservation of their own records and the suppression of those of their rivals. And here it should be noted that the losses suffered in this struggle for existence have told far more heavily against heretical, or, as we might say, Nonconformist Christians, than against those who kept to the main stream of tradition. Therefore, if we find that the



records of the earliest Christian centuries fail to confirm the nineteenth-century theory above mentioned, it is no answer to say that simple Bible religion was suppressed by ecclesiastical authority. For, to any unprejudiced judgment, it must appear with something approaching to certainty that the result of the struggle for existence amongst ideals and doctrines was that the immediately post-apostolic conception of the respective functions of the Church and Bible prevailed and were handed down identical in essence, though encumbered with many accretions, to future generations.

It may be plausibly said that Protestant pleaders for pure Christianity are not content to accept the post-apostolic Church as a final court of appeal, but insist on taking the judgment of the apostles and even Christ himself. But the difficulty in maintaining such an ultimate appeal is obvious. For what is commonly taken to be that supreme court is in fact constituted, and to a very large extent guided and ruled, by the post-apostolic Church. Thus you cannot possibly appeal to St Paul for the authority of the written Gospels, since in his day no written Gospels existed. Nor can you appeal to the Gospels for the authority of St Paul, since he is not only unmentioned in them, but unconceived and perhaps inconceivable in the Church life that gave them birth.<sup>1</sup> As

<sup>1</sup> The problem of the Gospels does not come within my range. But at any rate St Paul's exclusive insistence on the death and resurrection of Jesus, together with his really startling reticence as to the life of the Lord, betrays a spiritual standpoint indefinitely removed from that of the Gospel "rhapsodists"—if we may use the term. Besides, the Synoptical Gospels, though certainly unwritten during St Paul's life, except in possible fragments, show a childlike simplicity and Homeric objectivity suggesting an earlier tone of thought than that of the Pauline writings. They existed in the talk of the Galilean apostles and Judaic Christians before they were committed to writing. It is true that, so far as our information goes, the

is well known to all readers of even popular works on the Canon of the New Testament, this book, so dear to Christians, had no rounded completeness until the latter part of the third century. Indeed, when Eusebius wrote after the establishment of Christianity by Constantine, the authorship and authority of the Book of Revelation was still disputed. The Epistle to the Hebrews was assigned by some to Clement of Rome, by others to Barnabas, and by others again to Apollos. And it is scarcely possible that those who assigned it to such non-apostolic writers can have regarded it as authoritative in the same sense as the words of St Paul. The Epistle of James, also, was openly doubted, as well as the second of Peter and that of Jude. Putting aside, therefore, the Old Testament, there was even in the time of Constantine no guaranteed volume, or corpus, of divine revelation such as later Christians recognised in the "New Testament of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ." There were only a number of detached sacred books,<sup>1</sup> embodying partly the traditions of the Church concerning the ministry of Jesus, and partly the personal utterances of his immediate apostles.

Now, if the devoutest appreciator of "simple Bible teaching" will try to put himself in the place of the Christians living in those early days, he must own that

Gentile ministry of St Paul began within ten years of the crucifixion of Jesus. But from the beginning of his work, and throughout it, he lived, spiritually, socially, and intellectually, in a different world from that of the Palestinian Christians. There is a great deal implied in his declaration, Gal. i. 22, that he was "unknown by face unto the churches of Judæa which were in Christ." Now, it was certainly amongst the "churches of Judæa" that the reminiscences and imaginations took shape which afterwards developed into the Synoptical Gospels. Of course, these remarks have no reference whatever to the Fourth Gospel.

<sup>1</sup> κυριακαὶ ἢ θεῖαι γραφαί.

they would inevitably feel the want of some direction and guidance, other than that of these as yet independent and unincorporated books.<sup>1</sup> The private Christian found such direction and guidance in the corporate opinion of the congregation to which he belonged, and particularly of the leaders, the Presbyters or Bishops, two titles which from the very beginning of the second century began to denote two distinct orders of clergy. These leaders, again, being in correspondence with other congregations throughout the expanding Christian world, were able to say what seemed to them to be the judgment of the universal or "Catholic" Church. Or, if on any point considered important it appeared that the leaders of various churches were disagreed, the example recorded in Acts xv. was followed and the official representatives of the churches came together "to consider of this matter."

In this way there grew up, even while the New Testament was being formed, that commanding authority of the Church, apart from which the story of Christianity cannot be understood. Indeed, the want of a sufficient appreciation of this great prerogative of the Church has marred the Protestant conception of historic Christianity by reducing it to an estimate of more or less Bible in the various epochs, whereas it is perfectly certain that Church authority is considerably older than that of the New Testament, and it can scarcely be too often repeated

<sup>1</sup> If it should occur to the reader that the Sinaitic Codex makes a volume of all the New Testament books, he may be reminded that it contains also the Epistle of Barnabas, and nearly the whole *Shepherd of Hermas*, without the slightest indication that these books belong to a different class. Similarly, the Alexandrian Codex preserves the Epistles of the Roman Clement. The Vatican Codex is defective—all after Heb. ix. 14 being lost. It should be noted also that the differences in the order of books within these ancient codices suggest a still tentative arrangement of scattered MSS.

that the former determined what the latter should be. Nor can any difficulty be caused if we regard both the one authority and the other as purely natural forms of moral influence, explicable by their origins and by the circumstances and course of their evolution. Some of the New Testament books, indeed, were not the voice of the congregation, but of individual genius. It was not always easy to accommodate these latter to the official theology that might dominate the Church at particular times, but the Church that guaranteed the New Testament inevitably claimed the right to interpret, and thus ensured harmony within the fold. To the outsider, however, the more important question is what has been the service or the dis-service rendered by each form of authority to the progress of man.

Perhaps the first three centuries of the Christian era give as good an opportunity as any other period for studying that question. True, indeed, the religious history is in many parts obscure. But the salient facts of a quiet but resistless expansion of the Church, and of the evolution of the New Testament Canon, are clear enough ; and even the imperfections of ecclesiastical historians cannot deprive those facts of significance. In the age of Augustine and Chrysostom, secular power had already been captured by the Church. The only miracle worthy of religion, the victory of unarmed love and truth over unresisted brute force, had little or no chance of repetition in a church enriched and adorned by the State. Even before the permanent establishment of Christianity, the Church had already proved by experience that prosperity and ease may be worse than persecution. At any rate, Eusebius, writing of his own earliest years, declares that a long period of toleration had produced negligence and sloth



amongst the Christians, and that this relaxation of spiritual energy had given occasion to unbrotherly strife.

Yet no sooner was the anti-Christian edict of Diocletian posted up in Nicomedia, than a Christian was found bold enough to tear the *charta sacra* down, rend it in pieces, and trample it under foot. The exact terms of the edict are nowhere given; but the words of Eusebius suggest that it directed the destruction of the churches recently erected, and the burning of all writings that the Christians counted sacred. What, then, was the impulse which prompted the unnamed martyr of Nicomedia to tear down the Imperial decree? Was it corporate spirit or zeal for the Scriptures? No doubt it was both. But in what proportion were the motives mingled? On the whole, such records as have been preserved, and a comparison of the story of Reformation martyrs with those of the early Church, would certainly suggest that the heroism of the nameless martyr of Nicomedia and of the unconquerable hosts who followed him, was inspired more by the Church than by the Bible. The selection of the Bishops and Presbyters for specially vindictive persecution shows that the powers of this world recognised the Society and its traditions as the stronghold and fountain-head of what they considered a "pernicious superstition." And if they included the sacred writings in their promiscuous condemnation, it could hardly be because they knew what these sacred writings were, but simply because, according to common fame, those writings gave to the life of the Church a continuity which it was the business of persecution to destroy.

As it is not necessary to follow up through the mists of Christian origins this criticism of the comparative influence of the Bible and the Church in the inspiration of

martyrs, we may here call up at once the Lyons martyrs, whose pathetic story is told in an epistle from the church of that city, quoted by Eusebius. Of these martyrs we learn that amidst tortures the endurance of which would, to our self-indulgent age, seem incredible, were it not paralleled and confirmed by many other instances within and also without Christianity, a poor weak girl, Blandina, would reiterate again and again, "I am a Christian, and amongst us nothing base is allowed." The steadfast declaration was, no doubt, directly occasioned by the infamous accusations of incest and ritual murder made by stupid bigotry against the Church. Still, the inspiration of the corporate spirit is apparent, and when it is remembered how little opportunity poor Blandina could have had of studying the Scriptures, we may reasonably assume that her piteous cry told more of the power of the Church than of the Bible.

If we turn to the martyrology of Foxe, we find that in his accounts of Reformation martyrs quotations of Scripture are frequent, and minister greatly to the consolation of the sufferers. But in the original accounts of primitive martyrs of the Church this is not the case. On the contrary, the words of the Bible are comparatively infrequent on their lips. But instead, we have constant testimony of their loyalty to Christ as king of kings, and of their contempt for false gods. No doubt the position of Reformation martyrs was very different from that of primitive martyrs, inasmuch as the latter were witnesses for the Church, and the former were witnesses against it. And, naturally, the men who appealed from the Church to the Bible must needs make much of the latter. Such a comment, however, only confirms what has just been said as to the comparative prominences of Church

and Bible in ancient and modern times. The question as to the religious propriety of either attitude does not lie within our purview ; though every reader may form his own opinion from the facts of which we give a summary. It is sufficient here to note that during the struggles of the first three centuries the Church and its Founder are prominent, and the Bible in reserve.

This view of the relative positions of Church and Bible in those times is confirmed by many incidents of Church history, from which I select one or two, though many more might be given did space allow. If the Bible, and, in particular, the New Testament, had been the main subject of interest to the faithful ; if, in fact, it had been to the pre-Constantinian Church what it certainly was to Protestant communities and families in the nineteenth century,—it is difficult to conceive how so many biblical treatises or commentaries on the sacred text should have been lost. That the holy books themselves should be carefully preserved, guarded by appointed Church officers and concealed in times of persecution, was a consequence of their being regarded as the voice of the very earliest Church, uttered by or directly reported from the lips of the apostles and their Lord. But this treasure was in the charge of the Church, and the point of interest for Christians was not so much what individual Presbyters or Bishops thought of the sacred text, but rather what the Church said of it.

Take the case of Origen, one of the most interesting of all Church teachers, comparable in power of intellect to Augustine, and much wider in his sympathies. After the martyrdom of his father in Alexandria, Origen, though scarcely past boyhood, began to earn his living as a teacher

or lecturer in Greek literature. But he was much more devoted to the unclassical Scriptures. And as the violence of persecution had driven away the catechists, he boldly took up the work and speedily became a renowned and beloved instructor of catechumens. It was natural that such a man, when he afterwards devoted himself to a life of literary labour in the interests of religion, should have much to say about the books of the New Testament. But these comments have been preserved for the most part only in unsatisfactory fragments, while his controversial work against Celsus, an assailant of Christianity in the second century, has been preserved entire.

Another point to be noted is the preference of early Christian controversialists for the appeal to tradition rather than to the books of the New Testament. Not that the latter, so far as they were known and agreed upon, were ever slighted.<sup>1</sup> But such appeals to them as are scattered through the records of earliest controversy suggest an entirely different attitude from that of the modern Protestant, for whom nothing avails but reference by "chapter and verse" to the sole divine authority on earth, that of the Bible. Indeed, those ancient references to New Testament books appear not so much intended to invoke any written authority, as to recall the most ancient voice of the Church uttered at the very beginnings of tradition. For instance, Irenæus, as quoted by Eusebius, wrote a letter to Victor, the contemporary

<sup>1</sup> *E.g.*, Polycrates fortifies his own authority by a boast of "having studied the whole of the sacred Scriptures." The latter, of course, included the Old Testament, which could have no direct bearing on the Easter controversy. But the only text he adduces is, "We ought to obey God rather than man"; and the authority he adduces as to Easter observance is the practice of his predecessors and Church tradition (*Eus.*, V., chap. xxiv.).



Bishop of Rome, pleading for tolerance of conscientious differences of practice in the observance of Easter. What, then, is his chief argument? Not any quotation of St Paul's prose lyric on charity, nor yet any reference to that apostle's almost contemptuous indifference to the observance of days, but simply to the practice of departed saints. And he evidently regards as conclusive the testimony of Polycarp, who, when on a visit to Anicetus of Rome (*circ.* A.D. 157), could not be persuaded to conform to the Roman and Western observance, "because he had always kept the day with John the disciple of our Lord, and the rest of the apostles with whom he had been associated."

Be it remembered that the question in dispute concerned the proper day for terminating the fast preceding the chief observance of the year.<sup>1</sup> According to Polycarp, then, John, "the disciple of the Lord," and after Polycarp's time the reputed author of the Fourth Gospel, ended his fast on the 14th of Nisan, in accordance with Jewish custom. Now, was the meal with which he ended the fast a Christianised form of the Passover? It has often been pointed out, as a very significant circumstance, that Irenæus makes no mention of any reference by Polycarp to the Fourth Gospel on this point. The most rational explanation open to believers in the Johannine authorship would be that the narrative was unsuitable to his purpose because it does not refer to a Passover supper at all, but only to a "last supper," taken by the

<sup>1</sup> The churches of Asia Minor ended their fast on the date of the Jewish Passover—14th Nisan—whatever day of the week it might be; while the Western churches, and such Palestinian or Syrian churches as had, amid the vicissitudes of that disturbed region, lost their Jewish traditions, fasted on until the First Day or "Lord's Day," which they regarded as the anniversary of the Resurrection.

special authority of Jesus himself on the 13th of Nisan,<sup>1</sup> and not on the 14th at all. Still, it remains an insuperable objection to the hypothesis of Polycarp's recognition of a Johannine Gospel that he should not have referred to it at all on such a point as this, even if he had been obliged to explain and account for its difference from the other Gospels. But, further, Polycarp is represented as justifying his own practice, not only by that of John, but by that of "the apostles with whom he had been associated." The point I wish to make is not invalidated by the extreme improbability, amounting almost to impossibility, of his having been "associated" with any original "apostles"; for it is the ecclesiastical practice of the second century that I have in view, and not the accuracy of either Irenæus or Polycarp.

What would be the method of any modern controversialist, supposing him to wish to prove, as Polycarp did, that the Church fast ought to be ended on the 14th of Nisan at evening, and not on the artificially<sup>2</sup> calculated resurrection day in the morning? He would undoubtedly appeal, not to tradition, but to Scripture. And though the references at his service would only be at best indirect and vague, he would think them much more important and decisive than any tradition of the Fathers. He would probably quote the words of St Paul in 1 Cor. v. 7, 8: "For also Christ our passover is sacrificed:<sup>3</sup> therefore let us keep the feast," etc. And the argument,

<sup>1</sup> The day, of course, began at sunset.

<sup>2</sup> Easter Sunday is not properly the "anniversary" of any event, historical or mythical, because its coincidence with any possible recurrent day of the year is made impossible by the necessity for keeping to the first day of the week. It is an artificial accommodation for the sake of ritual.

<sup>3</sup> "For us," ὑπερ ἡμῶν, is not found in  $\kappa$  or B.

according to the analogy of such logomachies, would be that "let us keep the feast" means the cessation of the fast on the day which "Christ our passover is sacrificed." Again, he might refer to the anxious remonstrance of James, the President or Bishop of the brethren in Jerusalem, with the apostle of the Gentiles, as recorded in Acts xxi. 20, etc. It is made there perfectly clear that, with the approval of the elders, the Jerusalem Christians were "zealous of the law" and "walked after the customs." But, if so, they must have "kept the feast" on the 14th of Nisan, and could not possibly have observed any ecclesiastical fast which was prolonged till the supposed Resurrection morning.

Remembering, then, that the point of difference between Polycarp and the Roman pastor had nothing to do with the date of the Resurrection<sup>1</sup> but was concerned, so far as we are told, only with the proper time for ending a Church fast, we may be confident that if, in the opinion of Polycarp, the then existing fragments of the New Testament had possessed conclusive authority, he would have anticipated Protestant methods of controversy by citing such passages as the above in the Acts and Epistles, which were in all probability at his command. The fact or tradition that he did nothing of the kind, but only appealed to the customs observed in his youth under the guidance of elders with the ambiguous title of "disciple" or "apostle," is a striking and, indeed, startling illustration of the difference of the position held by New Testament Scripture, even among Christians, in the second century as contrasted with the nineteenth.

<sup>1</sup> The proper time for celebrating the Resurrection was, of course, involved; but that is a very different point from the real *anniversary* of Resurrection.

There is no need to carry the case further,<sup>1</sup> for it is sufficiently obvious that during the second century and even the third—if we may take Eusebius as representing the Christian opinion of his early days—the New Testament was “in the making.” And, so far as our information goes, the Paulicians, some three centuries after Eusebius, were the very first Christians to set up the New Testament, or at least the parts of it known to them, as independent of and superior to the Church in religious authority. Nor does the fact that they were inconsistent, and often in practice far below their theory, at all invalidate their claim to be the first Christian assertors of the superiority of the written Word to tradition.

It remains only to say a word on the strange influence exerted by the Old Testament over the beginnings of Christianity—strange, because that influence was made possible only by rabbinical and popular misinterpretations of the venerable texts, misinterpretations which would have been as incomprehensible to Hebrew lawgivers, prophets, and psalmists as would have been the “homooousion” of the fourth century, or the claims of Rome to spiritual supremacy over Zion. There can be no doubt that the first generations of Christians regarded the Old Testament with an awe and an absolute submis-

<sup>1</sup> The crucial case of the quotations by Justin Martyr, from what he called the memoranda or memoirs (*ἀπομνημονεύματα*) of the apostles, has been abundantly discussed, and it is common to suppose that everyone brings away from the study thereof the impressions with which he approached it. That, however, was not my own experience. Strongly disposed as I was long years ago to find in Justin's references a knowledge of our present Gospels, careful reading and comparison forced me at last to own that such a view is untenable. Whatever he had before him, the apostolic “memoranda” were not our Gospels, though, of course, generally coinciding with the traditions they give. A discussion would be out of place in a work like this.



sion to which no writings of their own teachers could then make any claim. Yet on this general acknowledgment two reservations must be made, the first concerning the two makers of Christianity, Jesus and Paul, the other concerning the elasticity of interpretation allowed to themselves by Christians, and the consequent unreality of their professed submission.

Let us, then, consider the exceptional attitude assumed toward the Old Testament by the original Founder of the Church himself, and also by the man who must be recognised as the second founder, without whom, indeed, it is hardly conceivable that Christianity could have survived the ruin of Jerusalem. Jesus himself was, as has often been reiterated, *a man of his time*, as well as a man of eternity ;<sup>1</sup> and he apparently shared, within limits,

<sup>1</sup> To prevent misunderstanding, it should be said that he was not the *only* man of eternity, though, indeed, there have been very few. For myself, I would hardly class St Paul among them, much as I admire him. His work was one of adaptation rather than of creation, and his adaptation was of a conventional, conditional, and temporary character—even though it lasted for centuries. But it is now becoming untenable. His doctrines of the Fall, of the Second Coming, of bodily resurrection, of the Atonement, and many others, are felt by an increasing number to be mere “*aberglaube*.” But the teaching of Jesus concerning a divine kingdom to be established by natural moral progress (Mark iv. 26, etc. ; Luke xvii. 20, etc.), his disparagement of miracle as compared with moral evidence (Matt. xvi. 2, etc.), his superiority to Sabbath superstition (Mark iii. 1, etc. etc.), and his teaching of the divine relationship of man, illustrate, and only illustrate, what I understand by a “man of eternity.” The incredible theological and teleological discourses which contradict such teaching, are too obviously lifted bodily, by second or third generation Christians, from Jewish apocalypses. A man is a “man of eternity” when he reveals in us some universal truth, or germ of universal truth, which does not die with the change of times, but only reaches higher expression thereby. There have been very few such men. Buddha was one. I know little about Confucius, but I suspect he was another. The fragments of Xenophanes would seem to justify his inclusion, and the next century will certainly include Spinoza ; but the names are only illustrative, and every one will form his list according to the impression of recorded utterances on his own soul.

the awe with which the Jews regarded the Old Testament. But it was only within limits ; for no one who regarded the written Word as unchallengeably supreme could possibly have spoken those passages in the Sermon on the Mount which contrasted the ancient law of the letter with the law of the spirit of life then struggling for utterance. "Ye have heard that it was said to them of old time. . . . But I say unto you. . . ." The first of these contrasts deals with the sixth commandment, on which Jesus puts an entirely new and unheard-of interpretation ; for he declares that what the eternal law behind the letter condemns is not merely homicide or violence, but unjustifiable anger and opprobrious language. To say that this only brings out the spirit of the commandment is surely to trifle with words. It proclaims a deeper morality, and in doing so it supersedes the old law. The second contrast, dealing with the seventh commandment, is not so violent. Still, the analogy of Scripture, and the Latin word adopted in our translation to express the forbidden crime, both suggest that the original prohibition extended only to intercourse with married women.<sup>1</sup> But Jesus not only enlarges the scope of the prohibition by extending it to all women, he again unveils an eternal law superseding the letter and condemning even illicit impulse. It is, of course, true that "fornication and all other deadly sins" of the kind were condemned in various parts of the Old Testament, but

<sup>1</sup> "Proprie adulterium in nupta committitur" (Papucian, quoted by Faceiolati). "Adulterium est cum aliena uxore coire" (Quintilian, quoted as above). The *New English Dictionary* allows a very early extension of the meaning of the English derivative, but Gesenius gives no case in which the corresponding Hebrew word means anything else. The spiritual applications of it scarcely count ; but they undoubtedly refer to breaches of a spiritual marriage.

to quote the seventh commandment as an injunction addressed "to them of old time," and to expand it into a larger moral rule, was almost as daring an utterance as that of Jeremiah, who declared that Jahweh had given no commandment to Israel concerning burnt-offerings and sacrifices, but had only required obedience.<sup>1</sup> One more contrast only need be mentioned here, between the "law of the spirit of life" in the Sermon on the Mount, and "the law of a carnal commandment as honoured by the Jews." The practice of confirming promises or covenants by a formal and solemn oath was not only permitted and even in some cases enjoined by the Old Testament,<sup>2</sup> but it was sanctioned by the alleged example of Jahweh himself, who is often described as confirming promises, threats, or covenants by a formal oath.<sup>3</sup> Nor were the more ancient recorders of Hebrew myths at all troubled as the writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews was, by the difficulty that an oath should be an appeal to a greater than the oath-taker. Thus, for instance, in the original story in Gen. xv. of the divine oath mentioned in the song of Zechariah (Luke i. 73), it is related simply how the consecrated formulas presumably used for solemn oaths in those barbarous times were observed in Abram's vision by the "smoking furnace and the burning lamp" which symbolised Jahweh's presence. Yet, in face of these scriptural precedents alleging the authority of Jahweh himself for the custom of confirming statements by an oath, Jesus pronounces the sweeping prohibition: "But I say unto you, swear not at all." And the reason given is as original as the disregard of Scripture is daring: "Let your com-

<sup>1</sup> Jer. vii. 21-24.

<sup>2</sup> *E.g.* Gen. xxiv. 3, l. 25; Numb. v. 19, etc. etc.

<sup>3</sup> See Ps. cv. 9; xcv. 11, etc. etc.; and *cf.* Ep. to Heb. vi. 13-18.

munication be Yea, yea ; Nay, nay ; for whatsoever is more than these cometh of evil." The last words have been confirmed by the experience of nigh two thousand years since then, but even yet "the law of a carnal commandment" deprives them of the appreciation they deserve.

The simplicity which regards this daring spiritualisation of Mosaic law, including the Ten Commandments, as a personal assumption of divine authority, does, I suppose, still survive. But it is an anachronism, belonging to a departed age, to a time when it never occurred to such interpreters to ask how the bystanders who heard this awful claim could afterwards treat the young Rabbi familiarly as one of themselves, "the carpenter, whose father and mother they knew." The divine authority was in the truth uttered, and not in the speaker. The phrase, "I say unto you," served the purpose of giving rhetorical emphasis to the contrast between the ancient and the new theology. Many a modern orator, inspired with an enthusiasm for social reform, exclaims, "I tell you this," "I tell you that," or "It has always been said that land is property, but I say it can only of right belong to the whole people." But it would surely be foolish hypercriticism to impute to such a speaker the arrogant pretence of being a supreme law-giver. It is only his rhetorical way of enforcing a truth that he vividly feels. And if anyone thinks that such a comparison derogates from the dignity of the Great Teacher, let me remind such an one of what is implied in the record that the "common people heard him gladly." They heard him gladly not because they thought he claimed to be God—for even his most intimate followers did not at that time dream of such a claim ; but the common people heard him gladly because he touched



their hearts, and for this an inartificial and unassuming rhetoric was indispensable. It is, therefore, no disparagement of Jesus to compare the directness and boldness of his language to the forms of speech employed by the best and purest social reformers of our own day. And if so, we may also be justified in saying that the freedom used by Jesus as a popular teacher in dealing with the letter of the Old Testament was an anticipation, as it has become an inspiration, of the similar freedom asserted by some of his most earnest followers in modern times.

The freedom of St Paul in dealing with the Old Testament was not nearly so daring as that of his Master. For while Jesus expressly superseded what had been "said to them of old time," and, in the case of the Sabbath, contradicted it both by word and deed, his apostle was content with the humbler method of mystical misinterpretation.<sup>1</sup> St Paul appears to have held to the last that the law was "holy, just, and good." To him every syllable and letter of it, as well as of the Psalms and Prophets, was something divine and awful. But by his methods of interpretation—learned, I suppose, in Rabbinical schools—he could make the sacred words mean anything necessary to his argument. Thus, instead of the changeless institutes of divine justice recognised in the Pentateuch by the orthodox Jew, St Paul saw only a "pædagogues"<sup>2</sup> to lead immature souls to the school of Christ. And to his mind this was made

<sup>1</sup> It is true that St Paul seems very bold in forbidding his Gentile converts to submit to circumcision, or to observe times and seasons, or holy days such as the Sabbath. But, as is argued further on, this was not a supersession of the law as in the case of Jesus; it was justified by an ingenious method of explaining it away.

<sup>2</sup> The pædagogues, of course, was not a schoolmaster but a child-leader, who guarded the boy on the way to school.

perfectly clear by the fact that Moses, in recounting the story of the divine covenant with Abraham, used the singular number (seed) and not the plural (seeds).<sup>1</sup> The argument was that this promise to Abraham's "seed" after him could not be applied promiscuously to all carnal offspring, which would have been "seeds," but must necessarily have had in view the one supreme "seed," that is, the Messiah. And the Messiah being, as St Paul had come to think, a spiritual saviour, brings into the Abrahamic covenant all who are united to him by faith. For the pivot of the argument is that the covenant with Abraham was an agreement to be carried out by faith, not by works (Gal. iii. 7, 8). But if any of the apostle's erring converts should doubt whether such an interpretation is quite legitimate, their instructor insists that all scruple should be removed by the story of Hagar, which the divine inspirer of the Pentateuch intended to be an allegory setting forth the inferiority of the merely carnal descendants of Abraham to his spiritual descendants through the one "seed," the Messiah (v. 16). "Cast out the bond woman and her son : for the son of the bond woman shall not be heir with the son of the free woman. So then, brethren, we are not children of the bond woman, but of the free" (Gal. iv. 30, 31).

To treat such an argument with apathetic contempt, as merely puerile, would surely indicate our lack of a "historic conscience." We shall do more justice both to the apostolic writer and to ourselves if we try to realise the antithetic spiritual forces of which such contorted arguments were the results. For St Paul was possessed through heredity and education by the peremptory certainty of a revelation made by Jahweh through the

<sup>1</sup> Gal. iii. 16 ; and *cf.* Gen. xii. 2, and xvii. 7, taken together.

Patriarchs, Moses, and the Prophets. Whatever may have been the case with more philosophic Rabbis of later days, Saul of Tarsus had not the most infinitesimal glimpse of the modern sceptical attitude toward the evolution of Judaism. No bodily sense of actual things around him could give him the same imperturbable, unquestioning—and perhaps, with all respect, we may say, stolid—feeling of sure and certain reality with which he was affected by the story of his nation. But, on the other hand, in early manhood his soul had been caught and wrapped in the blaze of a far more luminous certainty, dependent neither on past nor future, an up-rush in his soul of free devotion to righteousness—or, as he calls it, “the law of the spirit of life in Christ Jesus.”<sup>1</sup>

Yet, so far as we can judge from the incomplete evidence left us, there was never in his mind any thought of a contradiction between the national and the personal revelation. Nor is this altogether surprising. For even apart from the disputable, though very probable, hypothesis of Stephen’s influence, many methods of reconciling the two certainties could be found in Rabbinical lore. And I cannot regard as genuine rationalism the disposition to see nothing but absurdity in the method chosen ; for such a disposition surely betrays a deficiency in the “historic conscience.” But the irrationality of such rationalism forms no excuse for the opposite extreme of conservatism. Indeed, the modern bibliolater who holds fast to “God’s word written,” notwithstanding his acceptance of the proved facts of its compilation, and

<sup>1</sup> Rom. viii. 2. Even if the Pauline authorship of this epistle cannot be sustained, its phraseology, as well as theology, were largely borrowed from him.

also notwithstanding the evaporation of many of its alleged essential facts under historic criticism, has less excuse in reason than had the pupil of Gamaliel.

Still, St Paul's honest quibble about "the seed" should illustrate for all ages the facility with which unreason may be disguised as reason in veracious minds saturated by a false prepossession, and should, therefore, make for charity. The inborn habit of piety which assumes that God *must* be a sort of magnified human father; *must*, therefore, have "revealed" himself to his human children; and which proceeds to combine this certainty with the obvious fact that there is only one Church even pretending to a perpetual impersonation of such a revelation from the beginning of the world—has been conspicuous in minds that still command veneration. And though the paradox oftener takes humbler forms, at least those great instances of a venerable perversity should protect their lowlier imitators from irrational bigotry. Still, the scared awe with which many generations have regarded St Paul's preposterous violations of common sense is suggestive of many things in the relations of Man and the Bible. For as Spinoza teaches, if we confine our attention to the regulative effects of biblical tradition, we must acknowledge that many benefits have accrued to mankind therefrom. Yet, apart from Spinoza, it must be owned that the price of those benefits paid in mental humiliation has apparently delayed for centuries the progress of the world.

St Paul handed on to succeeding Christian writers the ingenious subtleties of non-natural interpretation learned in his Jewish schools; and this subtlety became in later times the awkward substitute for more courageous freedom of thought. I have already referred to St



Augustine's methods; and anyone who turns to the imaginative speculations which at the end of his *Confessions* he interweaves with the plain narrative of creation as conceived in the childhood of the world, will have a striking illustration of the illusions which belief in "God's word written" imposed on almost all the noblest minds of the Church.

For, as soon as the letters of St Paul himself, together with the artless narratives of three gospels, and the anti-historic idealism of the fourth, were incorporated with the "Word of God," the same ingenious sophistries were used by labouring souls to make those writings mean whatever the changing moral or intellectual tone of succeeding generations required that they should mean. Thus, by certain vague and indeterminate, as well as legendary words said to have been addressed by Jesus to St Peter, the whole claims of the Papacy were supposed to be endorsed. And in latest times "broad Churchmen"—as they used to be called—endeavoured to relieve Christianity of the horror of "everlasting punishment" by imputing to Jesus and his apostles certain philosophic conceptions of eternity of which it is practically certain they had no idea.<sup>1</sup>

And again, how often have Arminian opponents of Calvinistic fatalism laboured with agony to put some interpretation on Rom. ix., x., and xi. other than that which the chapters obviously bear! The instinct which revolted against arbitrary caprice and injustice in the Supreme Being could not be repressed. But its freedom

<sup>1</sup> It does not follow that they really did teach ever-enduring torments. For that also is a metaphysical conception, as foreign to their habits of thought as Spinoza's eternity. The real thought was that of a cosmic catastrophe in which the perspectives of the future vanished.

of expression was necessarily subject to reconcilability with the holy syllables of "God's word written." The freedom was indeed asserted, but it was done at the cost of humiliating submission to false interpretations, of which, notwithstanding all brave protests, the "subliminal" self was perfectly aware.

## CHAPTER VII

### THE BIBLE AND RELIGION

DURING the period of the Bible's widest sway over human life, that is to say, throughout the greater part of the nineteenth century, any discussion of the subject at the head of this chapter would have appeared to the generality of Christians superfluous or paradoxical, for it would have seemed to them that they might as well raise questions about the relations of physical light and the sun. As in this case, so in the other, it was admitted that many questions of interest were involved in the detailed effects of the heavenly radiance upon human receptivity and upon the life of the earth. But as the sun embodied or begot all light possible to man, so the Bible, as the sole revelation of the Sun of Righteousness, was identified with religion. There could not therefore be, at least to the common apprehension, any question of mere relation between the Bible and religion, for the first term meant the second.

But the historical, critical, and archæological investigations, hardly less characteristic of the last century than was the supremacy of the Bible, have gradually brought home even to ordinary intelligence the fact that, however valuable may be the influences of the Book, they are

comparatively novel to the world. They are, in fact, but of yesterday, in contrast to the unmeasured ages of human experience that elapsed before the first chapter of the Bible was written. And they are merely local when compared with the range of other moral and spiritual influences that raised and ruined empires, framed laws, and enforced social order, in lands undreamed of by Hebrew ethnology, and during millenniums earlier than the date assigned to Adam. Such achievements as these were impossible without religion ; and even for the purpose of an intelligent appreciation of the Bible, it is necessary to inquire what effect, if any, the Book, as it grew, exerted on pre-existing religions ; how far it rejected and destroyed them ; how far it adopted, remodelled, " re-stated " them ; how far it quickened and energised the forward impulses recognisable in some more ancient creeds. Nay, a generation claiming, as ours does, for all sects, freedom of thought, may have to face the question whether in any respect the Bible has stilled the breath of primeval inspiration, and arrested or perverted the evolution of a higher faith.

It is obvious that such an inquiry assumes at the outset a wider conception of religion than one which would identify it exclusively with that of any denomination, however great and renowned, even that of Christianity. The late Matthew Arnold's ingenious suggestion of " morality touched with emotion," would be very valuable if the right source of emotion were indicated. But it is not *any* emotion that will serve our purpose. For fear of hell is an emotion ; but morality touched with that is not only not religion, it is not morality. And, to take a better source of emotion, the gratitude felt by a drunkard to a good man who snatches him from a fatal danger



incurred through alcoholic madness, may impell the poor wretch to a dog's obedience for a time ; but it will not turn his new sobriety into religion. So, to cut a useless discussion short, I hold fast to Herbert Spencer's doctrine that the source of religious emotion is "the thought of a Power, of which Humanity is but a small and fugitive product—a Power which was in course of ever-changing manifestations before Humanity was, and will continue through other manifestations when Humanity has ceased to be."<sup>1</sup>

Now let us turn to Spinoza's definition of religion : "I include under religion all desires and acts of which we are the cause, through our having the idea or knowledge of God."<sup>2</sup> These words, interpreted in accordance with the use of language in the *Ethics*, mean that every mental affection or active impulse arising spontaneously within our proper nature through the possession by that nature of the idea or knowledge of God, is religious. But the whole system of Spinoza implies that the name God here has a meaning akin to, though not identical with, the import of the Spencerian phrase, "That which is behind Humanity and behind all other things." Thus we do no more than reduce Spinoza's definition to a practical form available for everyday life if we say that, whatever desires or active impulses arise in us of such a kind that they expand beyond

<sup>1</sup> *The Study of Sociology*, 2nd ed., p. 311. While quoting the words exactly as they appear there, I do not forget that the previous context contains phraseology such as I cannot now accept, e.g. "behind Humanity and behind all other things" (cf. Spinoza, *A Handbook to the Ethics*, Constable & Co., p. 9). It is specially the assertion of one exclusive source of religious emotion that I emphasise.

<sup>2</sup> *Ethica*, Part IV., Prop. xxxvii., Schol. : "Quiquid cupimus et agimus, cujus causa sumus quatenus Dei habemus ideam, sive quatenus Deum cognoscimus, ad Religionem refero." But for the word "cognoscimus" this might perhaps include the rites of Mumbo Jumbo. Yet I do not know that this matters much. See next pages.

self and exercise our loyalty to the divine Whole of which we are parts, are of the nature of religion. When, therefore, morality is touched by emotion springing from such a source, it is capable, if time were given, of attaining the highest ideal of religion.

But I am not assuming that it necessarily does so. For the idea of God, though from the earliest dawning of human thought about self and the world, associated with a mystic outlook toward infinity, has throughout the lifetime of humanity been cramped and distorted by inevitable errors incidental to the evolution of mind. And the only question for us here is how far has the Bible helped to correct those errors, to remove prepossessions, to clear the way for the largest faith, and to inspire progress towards it. We are not to deny the reality of a religion because it is imperfect. Nor should we allow ourselves to be prejudiced against any historic form of alleged divine inspiration because it could not convert barbarians at once into philosophic saints. But we may fairly expect as a guarantee of the reality of that inspiration some evidence of an expanding and purifying influence on the morality of the day. Thus, to take an example outside Christianity, the fact that an Arab prophet in the seventh century regarded the sword as a proper instrument of conversion, is not conclusive against the divinity of the impulse urging that prophet to proclaim the unity of God. But the absence from his creed of any scope for expansion toward a loyalty to the universe, or even toward a true human catholicity,<sup>1</sup> is proof enough that the

<sup>1</sup> This was written before the recent and startling revolution in Turkey. Whether that revolution will bring about a permanent renovation, remains to be seen, but in any case its impulse appears to have come from "young Turks," with a centre of organisation in Paris, and owing much to French ideas.

inspiration was very imperfect. And the total failure of Mohammedanism to raise the relations of man and woman toward the ideal implicit in sex, almost justifies scepticism as to the existence of any inspiration at all.

The point of view I shall assume is that of a religious catholicism wider than any historic church, a catholicism which regards all religions from the days of fetishism or animism, whichever was prior, as essentially one. For they have all been concerned with desires and active impulses arising in man through his having the idea or knowledge of God. It is true that in the earliest stages of spiritual evolution this idea or knowledge is so rudimentary as to be scarcely cognisable. But that is equally true of the earliest rudiments of music, painting, architecture, law, and all the noblest products of evolution. For in the amorous howlings of the earliest human creatures, no germs of the tone-poetry of a Wagner, or of the art of a Sims Reeves would be apparent, even to an angelic critic, if such existed then. Nevertheless, the germs were there, and the continuity of evolution has been unbroken. So likewise to those who recognise how evolution embraces not only the material but the spiritual forms of human experience, it is clear that both animism<sup>1</sup> and fetishism originated in desires and impulses arising in man through his having the idea or impression of a Power or Powers, real indeed, but so indefinite as to be to him practically infinite. That such religions suggested to their devotees practices revolting to our developed ideas and perceptions, is no more than can be said of creeds

<sup>1</sup> Of course I take this term as meaning not merely "ghostism," but the habit of regarding all things as in some sense alive. Fetishism certainly invests particular objects with a life to the powers of which no definite bounds are set by the savage worshipper.

very much higher in the scale of evolution. But, on the other hand, the facts of savage life in later days suggest, or indeed prove, that faithfulness to the tribe, heroism in battle, honourable observance of custom and treaty, as well as the rites of hospitality, owed much of their moral energy to the awe inspired by trust in or dread of supernatural powers. Our point, then, is this : that the gradual refinement and exaltation of such barbaric religions to the spiritual standard of an Augustine or a Spinoza, has been effected through special forms of human experience, such as imagined interference of gods, supposed chastisement of peoples by divine wrath, or blessings upon peoples through divine approval, reputed miracle, the prophetic word, and its embodiment in literature by nations boasting sacred books. And the object of our inquiry is to determine what part has been played by the Bible in this development of faith.

Now, in dealing with this question the sympathy we naturally feel for the better kind of bibliolatry prevalent in the last century must not be allowed to blind us to the imperfection, narrowness, confusion, and occasionally even the falsehood, of the ideas out of which that enthusiasm grew ; for the Bible-worship of our sainted grandfathers regarded the Book as a present gift from God, and took no thought of the gradual accretion and slow combination of its parts. In fact, they treated it just as they would have done a volume that had fallen as a bolt from heaven, accompanied by such a voice as was imagined on Sinai, declaring it to be the first and last word of the unseen Deity to man, until the world should end. There it was, an unmistakable revelation from a Being whose secrecy and silence apart from it caused many searchings of heart. For the spasmodic attempts made by millions



to assure themselves of "a very present God" subsided mostly in the cry, "Verily thou art a God that hidest thyself," and only a few realised how they had failed to find him just because they had tried to identify parts of the universe with the Deity who constitutes the Whole. But the Bible-worshippers found a solace in the curious concatenation of concealment and revelation found in the words: "No man hath seen God at any time: the only begotten Son which is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared him." And around this saying all the complex and heterogeneous fragments of Hebrew folklore and poetry and story grouped themselves from Genesis to the Patmos vision, so that an artificial divine unity was forced upon a number of varied glimpses of human evolution.

This Bible, thus arbitrarily stamped with a unity that existed only in the inherited prepossessions and socially reinforced devotion of the readers, was thus treated, notwithstanding St Paul,<sup>1</sup> as the sole witness for God on earth. Of course, there were what Oliver Cromwell used to call "providences"; and there were the lessons of history; and to the mystic there was the inward vision. Still, in the age of the Bible's apotheosis, all these were merely a reflex of what the student of "the Word" found in its sacred pages. Needless is it, surely, to disclaim forgetfulness of the scholars and divines, brave pioneers of truer thought, who not only in the nineteenth century, but in the eighteenth, were already teaching a more accurate and therefore a more reverential estimate of the Scriptures. But we are treating of Man and the Bible, and therefore are most interested in the common people.

<sup>1</sup> Acts xiv. 17: "Nevertheless he left not himself without witness," etc., even among those who had no Bible at all.

Now such superstitions as these must be wholly and utterly abandoned, if we would get a true answer to the question raised above,—How far has the Bible helped to clear the way for a larger faith than the primeval animisms, fetishisms, and idolatries, and to inspire progress towards its realisation? In attempting to answer the question it might seem natural to turn to ancient Israel, and ask what it did for the so-called “chosen people.” But then we are brought up by the obvious fact that ancient Israel never had any Bible in our sense of the word until after the Babylonian captivity; and even then it was incomplete. Literature the Israelites did indeed possess at a comparatively early period, as, for instance, the Book of Jashar and the Book of the Wars of the Lord. How far these have been preserved to us embedded in later works, it would perhaps puzzle the greatest professors of the higher criticism to tell us. But at any rate they are very confident, and apparently on good grounds, that the eighth and seventh centuries B.C. saw the completion by two authors or compilers, belonging one to the northern and the other to the southern kingdom, of two documents of folklore containing the chief adventures attributed by mythical memory to the forefathers and heroes of the race. But these documents<sup>1</sup> gave no account of the Creation, unless the strange and mutilated fragment in Gen. ii. can be considered such. They contained few Psalms, or religious hymns, unless we may consider as such the Song of Lamech, the blessing of Jacob, the Song of Miriam, and such like. Nor were any

<sup>1</sup> Called E and J by the critics, and to be carefully distinguished from P, the Priests' Document, dating, in its complete form, from the Captivity, and containing nearly all the religion and ritual of the Pentateuch. No one holds that the religion and ritual were then newly invented, but only that they then received the form in which we know them.

such higher religious elements added when the two documents were combined and formed into one book in the course, perhaps, of the seventh century B.C.<sup>1</sup> There were indeed psalms, used in the service of the Tabernacle or Temple, probably from the time of David. For the total rejection of the steadfast popular tradition about the "sweet singer of Israel" seems to me unreasonable, since the belief involves nothing impossible or irrational.<sup>2</sup>

But, taking the Jewish Scriptures as they existed in the seventh century B.C., before Deuteronomy was added, let us ask what there was in them calculated to inaugurate a movement toward the more spiritual religion of the future. We can scarcely say that they taught monotheism as it was afterwards understood. But they did certainly insist that the ancestral relations of Israel<sup>3</sup> with Jahweh were so close and sacred that any worship of other gods

<sup>1</sup> The reasons for such an approximate date are well given by Carpenter and Battersby in their *Hexateuch*, vol. i. chap. xvi.

<sup>2</sup> Of course the identification of existing Psalms with David's songs is a very different question. Here the "historic conscience" comes into play; linguistic problems arise; and discussions of congruity with the times to which they are referred. Wellhausen is probably right in describing the collection as "the hymn-book of the Second Temple." But, notwithstanding his learning, I still hope he is wrong in questioning "whether the Psalms contain any poems written before the Exile."

<sup>3</sup> To my mind the theory of Professor Karl Budde, that the nomade Hebrews, before they reached Canaan, were induced by the Kenites to adopt the god of the latter, and to make a solemn covenant with him at Sinai, appears to have many elements of probability. Certainly it goes far to account for the constant iteration of the "covenant" by priests and prophets. I don't remember any other people whose service of their god began with a formal covenant. But Professor Budde surely yields too much to tradition when he maintains the Egyptian captivity, notwithstanding the utter absence of any confirmation by Egyptian inscriptions or remains in Goshen. The so-called "treasure cities" prove nothing, in the absence of any evidence whatever that Hebrew serfs were employed on them. Professor Cheyne's theory of the issue of a nomade race from North Arabia—Muzri—is more likely. But see *Die Religion des Volke Israel, etc.*, von Dr Karl Budde, Giessen, 1900.

on the part of his chosen people was worse than treason, and of the nature of sacrilege. Yet that this duty of loyalty to Jahweh rested on no theological or philosophical monotheism is abundantly proved by the numerous passages in which the Old Testament writers lament the levity with which the Israelites transfer their allegiance to the various "Baalim" of surrounding tribes.<sup>1</sup> This levity is quite inconsistent with any pre-existing deep-seated conviction, founded on revelation, that there was only one God in the universe, and this God, Jahweh. But it is quite consistent with a formal covenant which the third or fourth generation of covenanters did not find it convenient to keep. Those who went after the various "Baalim" had not the least intention to deny the deity of Jahweh. But the various Baalim were also gods having special influence over their own territories, and to recently arrived invaders of these territories it might be of the utmost practical importance to cultivate their goodwill. Herein lies the whole explanation of what is often supposed to be the sheer perversity of early Hebrew idolatry.

But this is mentioned only to suggest the moral and material difficulties through which henotheism—or the doctrine of one nation, one god,—had to struggle, before it was established as the national faith. And that this was of the utmost importance for the future expansion of this new phase of original fetishism, will, I hope, be soon apparent. For without the henotheism of the early Hebrews, their later monotheism, or that of the Mahommedans, could never have arisen; and it was the Hebrew monotheism which was the germ of Spinoza's

<sup>1</sup> See Judges ii. 11, etc.; 1 Sam. viii. 8; Ezek. xx. The rest are given by Professor Karl Budde.



conception of God and the universe.<sup>1</sup> But, in considering the evolution of that conception, and in estimating the influence of the Bible upon it, we must carefully keep in mind what has been said above of the profound moral significance underlying Spinoza's definition of religion as including all that we desire and do through having the idea of God. For in Spinoza's gospel that idea is the great Whole of which we are essential parts, and he that realises this must necessarily rise beyond self. It is a long, long pilgrimage from the covenant God of Sinai to the clear and grand thoughts of the seventeenth-century Jew. But it is a sacred pilgrimage, a progressive elevation of thought and aspiration, unconsciously craving the blessed goal toward which all imperfect religions are striving, and which they at length must reach. Our purpose here is to trace the work of the Hebrew and Christian literature in their transfiguration.

It would be inconsistent with the scheme of this treatise to follow out in detail all the steps by which Jewish henotheism was transformed into universal or at least general monotheism, the belief in one God, one Universe. But the student of the Bible knows that this faith first appears clearly and distinctly in the prophets and later psalmists. Now, just in proportion as this belief prevailed, the moral connotations of religion tended to predominate over mere ritual. This is apparent in what is called the Deuteronomic literature of the Old Testament, including, besides the Book of Deuteronomy, many hortatory passages outside of it. Not that this Deutero-

<sup>1</sup> In saying this, of course, I am fully aware of what he owed to Descartes and earlier philosophers; but, *religiously*, the germ of his pantheism lay in his traditional monotheism.

nostic literature entirely despised ritual, but it was certainly characterised by a tendency to disparage ceremonial as compared with the affections of the heart. The psalmist who wrote—

“Sacrifice and offering thou dost not desire,  
Burnt-offering and sin-offering thou dost not demand.  
Mine ears hast thou opened  
By the book of the law prescribed to me.  
To do thy will, my God, is my delight,  
And in my heart is thy law,”

was certainly of this school of religionists.<sup>1</sup> But, if we may borrow the language of St Paul, Jeremiah “is very bold,” and says: “Thus saith the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel: Put your burnt-offerings unto your sacrifices, and eat flesh. For I spake not unto your fathers nor commanded them in the day that I brought them out of the land of Egypt, concerning burnt-offerings or sacrifices: but this thing commanded I them, saying, Obey my voice, and I will be your God and ye shall be my people.” Whatever may be the ingenious methods by which this utterance is reconciled with the words of Exodus and Leviticus, at any rate it bears witness to a growing predominance of the moral connotations over the external ritualism of religion, and so far it is a witness to the spiritual tendencies of the later monotheism as compared with the earlier henotheism or faith in the tribal god.

<sup>1</sup> The translation is that of the Polychrome Bible, under the editorship of Dr J. Wellhausen. If it should occur to anyone to refer to 1 Sam. xv. 22, “Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice,” etc., let him consider that what had there been required was obedience to a savage command and suppression of all human sympathy. Such an obedience was as much an act of external ritual as any sacrifice or burnt-offering. The sentiment of the fierce Samuel differs entirely from that of Psalm xl.

The vulgar remained henotheists, believing, no doubt, that their tribal Jahweh was stronger than any of the Baals, and would ultimately be more than a match for Merodach, yet still holding that his proper subjects were his covenanted people. But the prophets, with their more spiritual ideas of one Universe, one God, influenced in the first place the more cultured priests, and through them the few educated laymen, and gradually also the many to whom the prophetic lyrics or exhortations were recited or sung. But what inspired the prophets? So far as they were influenced by the half-developed Bible, Man is indebted to the latter for a beneficent spiritual revolution toward which only the most ineffective impulse can be discerned in the great literatures of Greece and Rome.<sup>1</sup> It is, indeed, doubtful whether the noblest declarations concerning God in the most ancient Bible could have been known to the earlier prophets, for the best scholars regard the sublime name *I AM* (Ex. iii. 14) as the addition of an extremely late philosophical editor. So too the advanced, though by no means perfect, proclamation of the divine attributes to Moses, appearing incongruously amidst an incident of debased anthropomorphism, when the lawgiver is allowed to see only the "back parts" of his God, is pronounced both by reason and authority<sup>2</sup> to be much later than the childish story in which it is found. Similarly, the story of creation in Gen. i., founded on Babylonian documents, but much simplified and ennobled by Jewish editors, had not been prefixed to the Bible of the earlier

<sup>1</sup> The idea was there, of course, but it did not take the practical form needed to lay hold on the common people.

<sup>2</sup> That is, the hard-earned authority of laborious scholarship. See Carpenter and Battersby's *Hexateuch* on the passage.

prophets. Still, the tradition of the call of Abraham, unhistorical as it is, suggested vaguely a larger theism than that of Ur of the Chaldees. And various incidents included in the Bible of Jeremiah, or, at any rate, in the traditions of his time, were suggestive of the transformation of aboriginal fetishism into a more moral religion. The story of Joseph has to me much more of a literary than a moral interest. Still, his resistance to one temptation, and his generous requital of the wrong done to him in youth by his brothers, together with the ample material rewards received by him, may have been in very early times a dim hint of a "power that makes for righteousness," and is able to control local gods. Even the bloody career of David is not without some relieving incidents which are similarly suggestive of a better religion than he knew ; such, for instance, was his submission to the rebuke of Nathan after the dastardly crime against Uriah, and also, though in a less degree, his refusal to drink of the Bethlehem water for which he had longed, because it was obtained by blood.

We must not undervalue such hints of the germination of a moral and spiritual monotheism in the earlier days of the covenant religion ; but such a violent contradiction of ritualistic tradition as we find in the above-quoted words of Jeremiah, is suggestive of more potent influences. Thus the increasing closeness of political relationships between the peoples of Western Asia would appear to have widened the view of the prophets. For the gradual evolution of a new empire by the suppression of the smaller kingdoms, the subordination of Egypt, the growth of a resistless sovereignty rooted in ancient Akkad, gathering to itself power by various revolutions, centralising in Babylon the whole resources of Mesopotamia, and cul-



minating in the supremacy of the invading Cyrus over all the world known to the Jews, made impossible the old idolatry which set up godlets over each region, with no co-ordinating power above them other than blind fate. So it came to pass that the concentration of earthly power was paralleled by the unification of the heavenly realms. And as the prophets were Jews, it was inevitable that their Jahweh was selected to be in heaven what Cyrus was on earth.

The question naturally occurs why this impulse to a spiritual monotheism so exceptionally affected the Jews, and why, for instance, the Babylonians did not put forward a similar claim on behalf of Marduk or Ea. The answer is twofold. For, firstly, the Jahweh covenant concentrated the attention of his worshippers more exclusively upon himself than was possible in the case of any deity not consecrated by any such special bond. And next, we must accept as a fact proved by the experience of three thousand years, that the Jews had what we can describe only as a special genius for religion. In their grand aspirations toward a realisation of the unity of spiritual life and power, an aspiration which culminates in Spinoza, they have no rivals. For Mahommedanism is at best a pale plagiarism of undeveloped Hebrew religion. And though the Christian Church, an offshoot of Judaism, can boast great saints, theosophists, and preachers, its Origenes and Augustines and Luthers and Calvins are mere spiritual pygmies when contrasted with the Isaiahs, the Psalmists, the Evangelists, or St Paul. Why it should be so is simply an unanswerable question. We might as well ask why Greece was so pre-eminent in literature, art, or philosophy, and Republican Rome, on the other hand, in war, juris-

prudence, and polity. The characteristics were in the soul of the people. But why they were so is a question the solution of which requires a greater knowledge of the interaction between Man and the Universe than is ever likely to be attained.

But, be that as it may, the later psalmists and the prophets did exalt the imperfect monotheism of the oldest Bible into an interesting and beautiful anticipation of a yet wider and more spiritual religion. Thus Psalm lxxii. prefigures a new moral world in which community of interest shall be so realised that the "poor and needy" shall be safe from "deceit and violence," and their blood shall be as precious as that of kings. Alas ! the shameful inequalities of social conditions at home, and the unabashed cruelties attendant on the march of empire abroad, painfully remind us that "the vision is yet for an appointed time." But it is still as true as when Habakkuk wrote the words that "the just shall live by his faith" ; and the principles suggested to faith by the seers of the later pre-Christian centuries cannot die. The very next following Psalm (lxxiii.) suggests such a grasp of the oneness of the moral order as no mere monotheism could or ever can permanently satisfy. The apparent disorders of the world, the supposed triumph of the wicked, the outward disasters of the true and good, all fall into their place as parts of an ordered whole when the Psalmist goes into the sanctuary of God, and realises the potency of a divine life embracing all. "So foolish was I, and ignorant : I was as a beast before thee. Nevertheless I am continually with thee : thou hast holden me by my right hand. Thou leadest me according to thy counsel, and takest me by the hand after thee. Whom have I in heaven but thee ? and there is none upon earth

that I desire beside thee. My flesh and my heart faileth : but God is the strength of my heart, and my portion for ever.”<sup>1</sup> For the ultimate goal of such spiritual aspirations we may have to press beyond Augustine, A’Kempis, or Tauler, and find it at last in Spinoza’s *Intellectual Love of God*. For further illustrations of the increasing morality of the later Jewish monotheism, we might refer to Psalms xv., xxiv., xxxiv., xxxvii., li., and many others, not forgetting the hundred and nineteenth, prosaic certainly, but a strong testimony to the moral tendencies of the monotheism of that writer’s day.

It may be questioned whether the prophets, even those of the Isaiah literature, advanced much beyond some of the Psalms in the spiritualisation of Jewish monotheism. But, after all, there is a difference between hymns—even the best—and poetry. Thus the hymns of Watts, Wesley, Cowper, and Faber are intensely devotional after the fashion of the Psalms. But the religious musings of Coleridge, and Wordsworth’s contemplations of the universe, and even the late Lord Tennyson’s rhythmic expositions of the “broad” theology of his day, have more volume and substance, and more intricate connotations of infinite truth. A similar, though certainly not identical, relation exists between the utterances of the psalmists and the most spiritual prophets. Thus, take the first chapter of Isaiah—the exact position of which in the literature bearing that name it is not necessary to determine ; we find here, instead of merely emotional utterances, such as those of Psalm li., a poetic and yet

<sup>1</sup> Where possible I gladly keep to the Authorised Version for reasons given in chap. ii. p. 47, but in the above I adopt the Polychrome Bible version of verse 24, because the Anglican is certainly misleading.

reasoned exposition of the moral and spiritual situation of the covenanted people. The old ritual, according to the description of the prophet, was maintained, but the moral ideal to which—in the view of the prophet—it pointed, was entirely ignored. And though this moral indifference had—according to the prophetic theory—brought a palpable and material curse upon the land, yet the misguided people had no notion of any remedy but a revival of fetishism and the multiplication of burnt-offerings and sacrifice. In such a condition of courtly and popular opinion, it was surely a brave voice that cried: “Bring no more vain oblations; incense is an abomination unto me.” . . . “Wash you; make you clean; put away the evil of your doings from before mine eyes; cease to do evil; learn to do well; seek judgment, relieve the oppressed, judge the fatherless, plead for the widow.”

The topic being merely incidental, it is impossible here to trace the expansion of this national moral ideal into a world-wide vision, which foreshadowed that republic of man which is the true kingdom of God. But the vision is certainly there, though dim. Israel is to be a “light of the Gentiles; to open the blind eyes; to bring out the prisoners from the prison, and them that sit in darkness out of the prison-house.” The divine vicegerent chosen to set Israel free for this spiritual mission to all mankind is himself a heathen sovereign. Thus the Isaiah literature anticipated St Paul in “breaking down the middle wall of partition,” and making all mankind one in God. “Neither let the son of the stranger that hath joined himself to the Lord speak, saying, The Lord hath utterly separated me from his people: neither let the eunuch say, Behold, I am a dry tree . . . for



mine house shall be called a house of prayer for all people." And then, with a note of contradiction not surprising in a variety of authors: "Thus saith the Lord, The heaven is my throne, and the earth is my footstool: where is the house that ye build unto me? and where is the place of my rest? For all those things hath mine hand made, and all those things have been, saith the Lord: but to this man will I look, even to him that is poor, and of a contrite spirit, and trembleth at my word" (Is. lxvi. 1).

The paradoxical position of Ezekiel, who begins by proclaiming with incisive eloquence the superiority of moral principle both to religious tradition and to diplomacy, and who ends by a tediously minute description of an imaginary temple and ritual, need not detain us. Our own age has seen in certain sections of the Roman and Anglican Churches a very similar combination of intense moral conviction and revived devotion to ritual. In such cases we always welcome the earnestness of moral aspiration, while at the same time we insist that the reaction toward fetishism is fortuitous, unreal, and explicable by ecclesiastical accidents. So in the case of Ezekiel, if the whole book ascribed to him is really his, we hail his strong convictions of truth and righteousness as veracious prophecies of the religion yet to be. But his curious descriptions of an ideal temple, and its materialistic rites, may well be assigned to the carnal prejudices which haunted the "subliminal consciousness" of the descendant of many generations of priests.

Resuming now our proper subject of the influence of the Bible on religion, as defined on page 176, I suggest with some confidence that it would be difficult to find in the rudimentary Bible possessed by the psalmists and

prophets any adequate inspiration of their nobler and more spiritual monotheism. The tribal god who required a father to offer a son as a burnt-offering, who sanctioned through Joseph—according to the story—the extortion from a famine-stricken people of the surrender of their land, their cattle, and their personal freedom as the price of relief by their own king, could hardly suggest the heavenly Father revealed to Isaiah, or the Psalmist's Messianic ruler, who should "deliver the needy when he crieth, the poor also, and him that hath no helper." Nor is this reflection at all invalidated by the occurrence here and there in the rudimentary Bible of hints of a better theology ; for, as previously mentioned, in some crucial cases they are nearly always later insertions. Or, if the Deuteronomic literature be cited, it really belongs to the prophetic age, and is among the first-fruits of the new theology, for which we have to account. There is no miracle, there is no supernatural revelation needed to explain it. The tribal theocracy had broken down under the stress of world-wide political change. Cruel, indeed, was the conviction borne in upon the prophets that the covenanted tribal Jahweh had proved to be weaker than the hosts of Asshur and Babylon. But with a fine courage which many champions of outworn doctrines against masterful fact would do well to imitate, they plucked even from despair the power of a resurrection, for they refused to credit the gods of Assyria or Babylon with the superior might that crushed Israel. No ; their forefathers had misunderstood the mystery of their God and of his immeasurable attributes. Those forefathers ought, indeed, to have known better ; for there is no new theology ever propounded which is not at the same time declared to have been from of old, from everlasting.

"Have ye not known? Have ye not heard? Hath it not been told you from the beginning? Have ye not understood from the foundations of the earth? It is he that sitteth upon the circle of the earth; and the inhabitants thereof are as grasshoppers; that stretcheth out the heavens as a curtain, and spreadeth them out as a tent to dwell in."<sup>1</sup> It was this supreme God, not of one tribe only, but of the whole universe, whose mysterious counsels required the temporary humiliation of Israel, and the apparent triumph of foreign despots, who were but pawns in his hands. "Thus saith Jahweh to his anointed, to Cyrus, whose right hand I have holden, to subdue nations before him. . . . I will go before thee, and make the crooked straight: I will break in pieces the gates of brass, and cut in sunder the bars of iron. . . . I am Jahweh, and there is none else, there is no God beside me: I girded thee, though thou hast not known me" (Is. xlv. 1-5).

It is true that even in the context of such passages there is a reservation of Jahweh's special favour for Israel, just as in war-time now, the most eloquent Christian sermons on God's universal fatherhood will always imply a special leaning of Almighty power toward his Englishmen. But the legend of Dagon and the captured Ark, when contrasted with the prophetic monotheism, clearly suggests that while in those barbarous times the tribal Jahweh did not disdain a trial of strength with other tribal gods, in the new age such a thing was inconceivable. For all the gods of the heathen were idols; and the best

<sup>1</sup> Let this and similar passages of the prophets be compared carefully with the childish story of the theophanies in Genesis and Exodus (Gen. xviii. 20, 21, etc.; xxviii. 13, etc.; Exod. xxxiii. 20-23), and it will be clear that something other than the old writings had elevated the religion of the prophets.

of the Israelites had already attained St Paul's contemptuous conviction that "an idol is nothing in the world." Further, the sense in which Israel still remained a chosen people was much more religious than that of the old savagery of Joshua, Gideon, and Jael. It was not merely for themselves, and for their own advantage that they remained God's chosen people, but for the sake of the whole world, on which they were to reflect the virtues that make for unity and peace and brotherhood. This is touchingly shown in the romance of Jonah, the fine meaning of which was for a long time missed through ridiculous wrangles about an impossible whale.

The pious narrator—who probably never dreamed that his apologue would afterwards be taken as prosaic fact—represents Jonah as called upon to do duty for Israel by awakening the Ninevites to a sense of the divine government which extended over them as well as the Jews. But Jonah fails in the courage of his faith, and suffers accordingly, by sinking, as all such cowards do, into "the belly of hell." Then, being dragged up again by divine power, and once more brought face to face with duty, he plays the man, and preaches repentance to an apparently apathetic city. The result surprises him. The whole people awake to righteousness ; and the doom which the Israelite missionary proclaimed is repealed. Then, with the characteristic self-seeking of such spiritual cowards as Jonah essentially was, he is offended at the slight he supposes to be put upon himself, and thinks—or says he thinks—it would be better to die than to live. And now follows the lovely parable of the gourd, which expresses in few lines the greater religion that was coming in sight : "Thou hast had pity on the gourd, for the which thou hast not laboured, neither madest it grow ; which came



up in a night, and perished in a night. And should not I spare Nineveh, that great city, wherein are more than six-score thousand persons that cannot discern between their right hand and their left hand ; and also much cattle ?” “Doth God take care for oxen ?” asks St Paul in one of his inferior moods. Well, the large-hearted author of *Jonah* thought he did. But what is more to the point, the many, the mob, the ignorant multitude were dear to the writer because they were human. And in the exaltation of that love he anticipated the socialism of three thousand years ahead.

This spiritual mission of Israel is often emphasised in *Isaiah*. No doubt Jesus felt it in that sixty-first chapter which he read to his unsympathetic fellow-townsmen : “Ye shall be named the Priests of the Lord : men shall call you the Ministers of our God.” “I will greatly rejoice in Jahweh, my soul shall be joyful in my God ; for he hath clothed me with the garments of salvation. . . . For as the earth bringeth forth her bud, and the garden causeth the things that are sown in it to spring forth ; so Jahweh God will cause righteousness and praise to spring forth before all nations.” It is difficult, perhaps impossible, for us to think ourselves back into social and spiritual conditions separated from us by nearly three thousand years. But, after all, there is a fundamental human nature which remains pretty much the same in all ages ; and after our critics have severed for us the chaff from the wheat in the bewildering literature of those days, there remains to us a tolerably clear conception of a monotheism, clearing itself by force of world-wide revolutions from the old barbarous henotheism, and beginning even to evolve somewhat premature germs of the doctrines of the fatherhood of God and the brotherhood of man.

It would inordinately increase the volume of this work were I to make any attempt to trace the varying fate of this spiritual monotheism through the five hundred years which elapsed before the Christian era. During those years the Old Testament Canon was completed. But it is obvious that the opinions and feelings of the leaders of Jewish thought exercised much more influence on the book than the book did upon them. If, therefore, the Wisdom of Solomon and the Book of Sirach were relegated to a category of books less inspired than Esther and Daniel, this was certainly not owing to the relative spiritual values of the books themselves, but to the prejudices of the Sanhedrim who had fallen back from the comparatively pure monotheism of Jonah, the Isaiah literature and Jeremiah, to a narrower nationalism. The short-lived victories of the Maccabees naturally fostered the unfortunate reaction. The vulgarity of this reaction is well exhibited by the "Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs," a document of the first century B.C., which Oxford scholarship has recently given to the world with an improved text and illuminating notes. From these Testaments it is clear that even at so late a date Jewish writers felt perfectly free to deal independently with legends already embodied in the Hebrew Bible. But it is of more importance to note that in the confessions of the patriarchs on their deathbeds, moral considerations had a much more important place than in the old documents which record their doings. Yet, while fully recognising this, we cannot blind ourselves to the fact that the Testaments are a tissue of superstitious maunderings, showing no appreciation of the more spiritual religion of the Isaiah period, and no anticipation whatever of the "Sun of righteousness" about to rise "with healing in his wings."

So far as we have gone, then, it would appear that the religious influence of the Hebrew Bible in course of its growth was simply a reflection of the faith, feeling, and hopes of successive generations in their gradual and devious ascent from fetishism to monotheism with a vague outlook towards something higher. The writers of the Book of Jashar, of the "Wars of the Lord," or of the documents J and E and P, did not so much form the opinion of their various contemporaries, they rather reflected it. Viewed with the dispassionate impartiality of the Pantheist who knows that "*all* things are of God," the development of the Old Testament Scriptures is a specially interesting case of the sectional movements toward a higher religion in Assyria, Babylon, India, Egypt, later in Greece, and afterwards in Rome.<sup>1</sup>

But the evolution of Jewish literature and opinion is specially interesting, because that people, as commonly recognised, had an unrivalled genius for religion; and probably they alone, of all the races of the earth, were capable of producing a Christ or a Spinoza. But when it is said that the Hebrew Bible, in the course of its growth, was simply a reflection of the faith, feeling, and hopes of successive generations in their gradual and devious ascent from fetishism to monotheism, it must be understood, of course, that this reflection affected for good or evil each new age. The bewildering results were represented by the complicated compilations of discordant documents which ensued, and by the "redactions" and interpolations which gave the world at last

<sup>1</sup> The fantastic orgies of insane emperors, and the degradation of the Plebs after the murder of the great Julius, when his work was not half done, should not blind us to the existence of cosmic emotion such as that of Lucretius, or the true, though weak, wisdom of Seneca, or the aspirations of Marcus Aurelius.

the most amazing and interesting collection of religious books it possesses. Throughout this review the idea of what is vaguely termed supernaturalism or "miracle" has been ignored. It has been assumed that the Universe is one, and that what went on in the infinitesimal little corner of it called Judæa was only a natural modification of the processes going on wherever intellect, self-love, and self-sacrifice strove together under the sense of an infinite Beyond.

It is now time to turn to the Christian supplement to the Hebrew Scriptures; for Christianity is as much a natural development of Jewish monotheism as any fruit is of its preceding bud and blossom. In both cases, however, there is a good deal more to be considered than mere rearrangements and developments of tissue in the vegetable life or transmutation of ideas and feelings in the religious life; for there are in the former possible changes in the soil through weather or culture, and there are the sweet and bitter influences of the seasons. In fact, there is the whole surrounding medium. So while we may rightfully regard Christianity as the natural outcome of the later Jewish monotheism, yet we must not forget the special influences and accidents<sup>1</sup> of the first century's religious life.

Of the ideas then prevalent, that of a suffering Messiah, based on Isaiah li. and other scriptures, was most potent. Of the accidents, that of the concurrence of visions and legends of the resurrection was the most decisive. The latter stories are, of course, to be estimated by St Paul's account of his own vision (I Cor. xv. 8), which the apostle of the Gentiles passionately insists is equal in

<sup>1</sup> *I.e.*, appearing so, because of our "inadequate ideas" of things as they are in the infinite Whole.



value to that of Peter or the Twelve, or the five hundred brethren, or James. Now, those who most sincerely take him at his word must clearly recognise that the bodily resurrection was one of the accidents due to the spiritually electrical atmosphere of the time. But then, granting the idea of a suffering Messiah, and the accident of a visionary resurrection, the way was open to such an expansion of spiritual monotheism as had scarcely been dreamed of even in the literature of Isaiah.

Dealing as I am with the Bible, it is not within my province to discuss what residual elements of fact there may be in the charming and tragic story of the Gospels. If I may obtrude a personal opinion, I believe there is much more fact in them than bloodless criticism allows. But that has nothing to do with my present task, which is to discuss the relations of the Bible to religion. Now, undoubtedly the first New Testament documents given to the world were some of St Paul's Epistles.<sup>1</sup> Happily for me, it would be quite irrelevant to this part of my subject to attempt any distinction between the authentic and unauthentic writings of the apostle. The thirteen epistles, excluding that to the Hebrews, constitute a Pauline literature; that is, they give clear evidence of the impulse of one mind having its own theory of Christianity,

<sup>1</sup> Some, I don't know which, but Galatians, at any rate. Internal evidence is sometimes more convincing than external, and I cannot imagine a pious and reverent forger—there were many such in the second and third centuries—writing of St Paul as he does here of himself. The personal reminiscences (chaps. i. and ii.) contradicting Acts—the passion of which he becomes ashamed—"I am become a fool in glorying; ye have compelled me"—and the manifold grief of a teacher and leader who has been supplanted, seem to me beyond imitation. I am afraid the Epistle to the Romans must be surrendered; afraid because, granting its premises, it is such a masterly piece of work. But I hold to the two epistles to Corinthians and also to Philemon. However, these questions are now trivial.

quite apart from the Gospel tradition, and that of the churches of Judæa. We may very well, therefore, note the Pauline influence on religion, apart from any earlier preconception or later conclusions as to the authorship of particular letters.

There is a passage in the Epistle to the Colossians (iii. 17) which closely approximates to Spinoza's definition of religion : " Whatsoever ye do, in word or in deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God and the Father by him." " I include under religion," says Spinoza, as already quoted, " all desires and acts of which we are the cause through having the idea or knowledge of God." The variations and the obscurity of the Pauline ideas about God and Christ do not here affect the similarity, or rather, identity of thought ; for, plainly, the Pauline idea of religion was the habitual connection of our desires and acts of which we are the cause<sup>1</sup> with the idea or knowledge of God. But that is also Spinoza's definition of religion. And in so far as the Christian writings tended to promulgate this notion of religion, it may be said, subject to certain reservations, of which the nature will be gradually apparent, that Christianity was a potent influence in the age-long evolution from fetishism to Pantheism.

But one of the reservations above mentioned occurs to us at once. For while Spinoza's definition is applicable to every form of religion, from the worship of Mumbo Jumbo to the philosopher's own transcendental reverence for the All in all, we in the most recent stage of evolution find it difficult or impossible to conceive how the crude,

<sup>1</sup> The latter words were intended to exclude desires and acts of which the true self is not the cause, but which are incidental to the "human bondage" which Spinoza treats in the Fourth Part of the *Ethics*.

childish, or cruel notions of God, prevalent in a previous stage, were necessary parts of one harmonious whole. It may be true that Luther, when he acquiesced in the massacre of the peasants maddened by suffering and fanaticism, and that Calvin, when he approved the savage murder of Servetus, "connected his desires and acts<sup>1</sup> with the knowledge and idea of God." But what god? Certainly not the God of Jesus, nor yet the God of Spinoza. We have to ask, then, not only how far the Christian Bible awakened in men a sense of the Divine Presence as distinct from the fear or hope arising from fetishistic charms, but also how far that Bible tended to refine and elevate the idea of God.

Now, here we cannot help noting a difference between the Gospels and the Epistles, while at the same time we recognise that the difference is not one of opposition, but only the difference between a less developed and a more developed Christianity. For, however the paradox may be explained, it is clear that the Synoptic Gospels,<sup>2</sup> though comparatively late in their present form, represent in the materials out of which they have been compiled an earlier and simpler form of Christian belief and practice than that which we have in the Pauline literature. This is not the place to argue the question, but my conclusion rests on fifty years' careful study commenced with very strong and even passionate prepossessions against that conclusion. I am bound, therefore, to make use of what I consider hard-won truth in my survey of the relations

<sup>1</sup> Spinoza carefully adds, "of which we are the cause." He would probably have held that in these cases it was panic or prejudice, not the true self of Luther or Calvin, that was the cause. But these refinements would be out of place here.

<sup>2</sup> I must reiterate that the Fourth Gospel does not count, being a very late first-century or early second-century romance.

of Man and the Bible. For these differences between the Gospels and the Pauline letters, or even the eirenicon of the Acts, are not a little startling.

In the Gospels the main and all-pervading purpose of Christ's teaching is to insist on the fatherhood of God in a sense never before conceived. But in the Pauline letters and Acts, though the divine fatherhood is retained, and many stimulating lessons of morality are connected therewith, yet the most insistent and pressing message is the need of personal deliverance from impending damnation. Now, although John the Baptist seems to have had much to say about "the wrath to come," and though the gentler Jesus also at times presaged some terrible fate for the lying sanctimony of the Scribes and Pharisees,<sup>1</sup> the proportion between the two elements of Christian teaching is wholly different in the two sets of documents. It is true that in the Synoptical Gospels we have the germ of the doctrine of the new birth, so startlingly developed in the Fourth Gospel. But that germ consists simply in the insistence on the need of a childlike nature to appreciate the fatherhood of God (Matt. xviii. 3, xix. 14). There is no notion here of any supernatural re-birth. But the latter idea would very easily grow out of it, as in fact it did. Yet the original Gospel laid no emphasis whatever on this "conversion," except as preliminary to an appreciation of God's fatherhood. We seek in vain through all literature for any complete parallel to the teaching of Jesus on the fatherhood of God. For the

<sup>1</sup> The teleological discourses of Matt. xxiv., xxv., and parallels were never uttered by the lips that said, "The kingdom of God cometh not with observation," or which spoke the parables of the seed and the leaven, indicating a natural, imperceptible growth, and not a catastrophe. Those discourses seem, as previously said, to have been lifted bodily from late Jewish apocalypses.



Greek notion of Zeus as "Father of gods and men," if anything more than a poetic figment, is only a reference to the origin of things. But this dim suggestion is shadowy indeed compared with the full-blooded reality and heart-touching kindliness of affection which gave substance and force to the doctrine of Jesus concerning "the Father." Passages, no doubt, might be quoted from the Greek and Roman classics—even from the fierce Juvenal<sup>1</sup>—which attribute to the gods a parental, or at any rate a benevolent interest in human affairs. But to compare them with the teaching of Jesus concerning the heavenly Father would be inept. A much closer approach is made by the Isaiah literature. "Doubtless thou art our father, though Abraham be ignorant of us, and Israel acknowledge us not. Thou, O Jahweh, art our father, our redeemer" (lxiii. 16). But how vague is this notion of divine fatherhood compared with the Gospel words: "Love your enemies, bless them that curse you . . . that ye may be the children of your Father in heaven; for he maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth his rain on the just and on the unjust." It may be forcibly objected that here moral questions of the divine government are raised to which the lovable teacher does not seem to have given a thought. But that does not in the least interfere with the charming conception he gives us of supreme love enthroned as the Father of mankind. For observe, when speaking of sunshine and rain, Jesus could not possibly have been thinking of Israel only, but of humanity at large.

Again, take the words, "Your Father knoweth what things ye have need of, before ye ask him"; or, "If ye

<sup>1</sup> *Sat.*, x. 1. 350.

then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your heavenly Father give his Holy Spirit to them that ask him?" True, the Psalmist came even nearer than Isaiah to the teaching of Jesus, when the sacred lyrist sang, "Like as a father pitieth his children, so Jahweh pitieth them that fear him." But the words "them that fear him" suggest a limitation nowhere apparent in the words of Jesus. On the contrary, he showed a special tenderness toward sinners who were not supposed to fear Jahweh. And, in fact, he is reported to have said: "I am not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance." Still further, if ever his loving soul was liable to outbursts of volcanic wrath, it was when he saw in the religious leaders of the day a sanctimonious fear of Jahweh unaccompanied by the love of man. It is quite possible that the invective of Matt. xxiii. has given us an exaggerated notion of the wickedness of the Scribes and Pharisees. But the one thing wanting in them in the eyes of Jesus was a sense of the fatherhood of God as he realised it; and this he could not condone. Moreover, although during the brief months of an undeveloped work he appeared to feel that his immediate mission was limited to Galilee and Judæa, yet his bearing toward the Samaritans, toward the Syro-Phœnician woman, and toward the Roman centurion, seem to imply a suspicion, or even conviction, that amongst the uncovenanted peoples there was to be found an unsophisticated human nature more susceptible to the sense of divine sonship than were the supposed children of the Kingdom.

The teaching of Jesus, then, consisted simply in the proclamation of a divine Father, and insistence on reversion to a childlike spirit as a condition of the reception of

that truth. He did, undoubtedly, likewise expect a "kingdom of God" on earth equivalent to a republic of Man under the sway of divine love. He also taught a supremely beautiful morality as essential to that perfect social state. But all rose out of, and centred in, his teaching of the fatherhood of God. That this fatherhood was intensely anthropomorphic, and therefore impossible to any permanent and universal religion, need not here concern us; because we are engaged in an examination not of ultimate truth, but only of the historic relations of the Bible and Man. Now, it has been already suggested on a previous page that the Acts and the epistolary literature of Christianity differ very much in tone. Indeed, this conspicuous concentration of all thought on the divine fatherhood and human sonship is in that epistolary literature so largely modified, that we seem almost to be introduced to a new religion. I have said that the difference is not one of opposition but of development. It is, however, one of those incidents of evolution which we could well wish had happened otherwise. But it could not be. The charming doctrine of Jesus concerning a divine fatherhood which needed only a childlike heart to receive it, had no chance of survival outside the little band of immediate adherents who were fascinated by his presence and his living words.

But in the world which St Paul and his fellow-labourers had to confront, it was not so much the fatherhood of God as the immortality of the soul in blessedness or misery that was becoming the question of intensest interest. It would require altogether too long a digression to discuss the causes which in the early centuries of the Christian era gave to this question a disproportionate importance. But a word or two must necessarily be

said. Amongst all the vagaries of human feeling, perhaps nothing is at once more curious and pathetic than the various attitudes of different races toward speculations on immortality. The Egyptians had such a strenuous conviction of the resurrection of the body—if it were only properly preserved—that they spent the acquired wealth of a lifetime on fortress tombs. Yet the Israelites, who are supposed to have lived some four hundred years under their immediate influence, had no notion of immortality except the shadowy Sheol which corresponded to the heathen Hades ; and neither represented anything but a negation—the impossibility of conceiving annihilation. On the other hand, countless millions of Oriental races made the chief ends of religion to be a conquest over that very difficulty of conceiving annihilation, and the total and utter suppression of personality.<sup>1</sup> Yet, in striking contrast to this Oriental craving for annihilation, we have the enthusiasm of the “Mysteries,” Eleusinian and others, which from early times gathered together little churches—for so we may call them—of men who were consumed with a desire to “lay hold on eternal life.”<sup>2</sup>

At the time of the Christian era these “Mysteries” were taking on a new character. For, whereas in the earlier days of the Eleusinian and other Mysteries the thoughts of the “Mystæ” were occupied solely with the craving for personal immortality, there was generated

<sup>1</sup> On this point Pali scholars are not agreed, but Professor T. W. Rhys Davids holds that the notion of a “soul” is foreign to true Buddhism. “Karma” is a very different thing. The ultimate aspiration of the devout Buddhist is “the going out” of this “Karma.” What is then left—if anything—certainly would not answer to our idea of immortality. This latter is my own conclusion, and I do not pretend here to claim the authority of my friend Professor Rhys Davids.

<sup>2</sup> See *passim*, *Das antike Mysterienwesen in seinem Einfluss auf das Christentum*, von Gustav Aurich, Göttingen, 1894.



now a sort of pious mysticism, not at all totally alien to that of the later Middle Ages. Thus it was not only a continuance of personal life that was desired, but a life in communion with a vaguely conceived divine Being. The forms in which this desire expressed itself were imperfect and rude, often corrupted by the arts of magic. But the desire was there, and in all the circles scattered throughout Asia Minor, Greece, and Italy, where this desire had drawn devotees together, material was provided as susceptible to the Christian mission as dry tinder to fire. There is probably the germ of such a spiritual aspiration to be found in a well-known fragment of Pindar: "Blessed is he who after vision of those (mysteries) sinks beneath the hollow earth. He knows indeed the end of life ; but he knows (also) the God-given beginning."<sup>1</sup> From the idea of the God-given beginning of a higher life to the idea of a life in God is not a great step. Yet it seems to have required several centuries to make the latter idea general amongst the circles of the "Mystæ." But that this step had been accomplished about the beginning of the Christian era, before the Gospel had reached Greece or Italy, is, I think, fairly established by Gustav Aurich in his work on the ancient Mysteries.

Now, if this be so, it is obvious that this state of things offered facilities of which Gibbon never dreamed for the rapid spread of Christianity. It is not in the least necessary to suppose, and for myself I do not believe, that

<sup>1</sup> " ὁλβιος ὅστις ἰδῶν ἐκείνα  
κοίλαν εἴσιν ἰπὸ χθόνα  
οἶδεν μὲν βίτου τελευτὰν  
οἶδεν δὲ διόσδοτον ἀρχάν."

Fragment 102 in Donaldson's *Pindar*. The arrangement of the lines is Donaldson's, and also the reading *βίτου*, as equivalent to *βίου*. The sense, apparently, is that a death sanctified by the Mysteries is the beginning of immortal life.

the primitive Christian rites were borrowed from these Mysteries. On the contrary, though purification and baptism and a sacramental meal each had a place in the Mysteries, I cannot doubt that these rites among Christians all had a Jewish origin. But surely the existence of a considerable number of people eagerly longing for an assurance of personal immortality, and for communion with God,<sup>1</sup> must have been very favourable to the success of St Paul and his colleagues. For it was something entirely new, and must to the prevalent mood have been startlingly impressive to hear a man say, "You want assurance of immortality? Well, I have seen my Lord and Saviour after he rose from the dead!"<sup>2</sup> Criticism of such visions did not naturally occur to moods of ecstasy. And if he went on to teach, as the later Pauline literature would suggest, that the elect who believed in the risen Saviour became parts of his body—"the fulness of him who filleth all in all"—nothing could be better adapted to meet their spiritual desire for union with God. The solid fact of the Resurrection—for so they regarded it—was the firm foundation which not only sustained their hope of immortality, but also confirmed their assurance of ultimate union with God.

This digression is not useless if it prepares us to understand the great difference between the teaching of the epistolary literature and that of the Gospels.<sup>3</sup> The

<sup>1</sup> The polytheism of the mob may be left out of consideration. Whatever the cultured "Mystæ" thought about Olympus, they were sure that all partial divine manifestations merged ultimately in the Infinite Life.

<sup>2</sup> That this was often his argument is clear enough from 1 Cor. xv.

<sup>3</sup> It may be necessary to reiterate that the Fourth Gospel does not count. Unique as a work of literature, it belongs rather to the age of the latest Epistles than of the Synoptics. And yet it does not fit in with the former either. It is in a position of "splendid isolation."

Epistle to the Romans, though to me its Pauline authorship is more than doubtful, does, at any rate, give us an elaborate account of the fully developed Pauline doctrine of salvation. Not that it represents the final stage of that doctrine. This must be sought rather in the Epistles to the Ephesians and Colossians. I am not, however, dealing with the history of doctrine, but only preparing to show how the later Christian Scriptures affected religion. Now, the teaching of the Synoptic Gospels is that to be saved—whether in this world or the next—a sinner has nothing to do but to repent, and, with the simplicity of a little child, yield to the fatherhood of God.<sup>1</sup> The fact of moral salvation by faith may indeed be at the back of the Synoptic teaching, but only in the sense that all conversion from worse to better involves loyalty to some hitherto unknown or neglected best. And this is a principle applicable to all religions from animism to Pantheism. The passages which mar this simplicity of the original Galilean gospel are obviously intrusions in the course of the perilous vicissitudes of growth and compilation to which the earliest traditions were exposed. For if the traditions which give us the Sermon on the Mount, or even the invective against the Scribes and Pharisees, may be regarded as the essence of the teaching of Jesus, then all allusions to the “ransom” of sinners by his death, or to salvation from hell by personal faith in a mysterious sacrifice, or to a judgment day in which the meek and lowly Jesus is to sit as arbiter of all human destiny, are

<sup>1</sup> See Matt. xviii. 3, xix. 14; Luke xviii. 13, 14, xix. 8, etc. etc. The succeeding context of this last, “the Son of Man is come,” etc., is just one of many Gospel passages which are forced into an unnatural meaning to comply with the “plan of salvation” in the Epistles.

so utterly incongruous, that they can only be explained as foreign elements absorbed in the course of the evolution of Church thought.

This, however, we may say with confidence, that the original Galilean doctrine of renewal by a return to childlike simplicity and acceptance of the fatherhood of God, continued to be through all Christian ages far the most precious and inspiring element in the Christian Scriptures. I do not say that it is permanent; for "when that which is perfect is come, then that which is in part shall be done away." But this soul of the religion has at any rate preserved Christianity from a universal degeneration into an irrational system of Græco-Judaic theosophy little better than Manichæism. For in all ages of Papal, Episcopal, Presbyterian, Lutheran, and Calvinistic corruption, there have always been left the proverbial seven thousand who have not bowed the knee to these Baals, but have felt that self-surrender with the acceptance of the divine fatherhood and human brotherhood is worth more than all decrees of councils and all creeds. However, this obscure persistence of the original Gospel was far from being influential enough to neutralise the dangerous and even evil effects of the later Christian Scriptures on the religion of the world.

Could we allow ourselves to dwell exclusively on the exquisite moral episodes in the Pauline literature, such, for instance, as Rom. xii., 1 Cor. xiii., Gal. v. 16-26, Eph. iv. 20-32, we should be utterly unable to account for the "bitterness and wrath and anger and clamour and evil-speaking" which blacken the pages of Church history. But when we find belief in supernatural wonders substituted for the childlike attitude toward the Eternal Father, which was all that Jesus asked, we detect at once



the germ out of which grew bigotry, intolerance, ecclesiastical tyranny, and cruelty. "If thou believest with all thine heart, thou mayest" is the traditional answer of Philip the Evangelist to the Ethiopian eunuch's request to be baptized. And the answer of the Ethiopian was: "I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God"—a very simple creed; and well would it have been for the Church and the world if that creed had never been enlarged. But still, what in the nature of things had it to do with moral regeneration? As the reputed Epistle of James says: "The devils also believe and tremble." Accidentally perhaps, and by the power of association, such a belief might concentrate attention on the moral ideal incarnate in Jesus. But the story of the believing Church, as well as James's devils, proves beyond any possible contradiction that the effect was only accidental and indirect—achieved in one believer, and totally wanting in ninety-nine. In fact, this arbitrary and unfortunate connection of salvation with belief in alleged supernatural wonders, poisoned, close to the spring, the living water of the Christ's limpid truth, and infected all following ages down to the present time with the curse of metaphysical or theosophical creeds.

Notwithstanding what has been said above about the unhistorical character of much in the Synoptic records, I am quite prepared to admit that Jesus himself demanded faith, and insisted on its moral omnipotence. But the faith that he demanded was faith in God the Father, and not belief in any supernatural wonder. It is probable that Jesus said, in the figurative style natural to Oriental teachers: "If ye have faith, as a grain of mustard seed, ye shall say unto this mountain, Remove hence to yonder

place ; and it shall remove, and nothing shall be impossible unto you." But what he meant by this faith was loyalty to the Father and the divine order, and certainly not any belief in supernatural wonders or doctrines.<sup>1</sup> Now, this is precisely the moral quality which is always predominant in those who achieve apparently impossible victories over falsehood and wrong. "Out of weakness they were made strong, waxed valiant in fight, turned to flight the armies of the aliens," because the thing they opposed was intolerable to their loyalty to divine order, whether in the domain of morals or of thought. Thus it was surely not so much Wycliffe's belief in a book as his loyalty to God which made a conventional, mercenary, and cruel church unbearable. *Piers Plowman*, too, was well skilled in the Scriptures ; but his quotations from them suggest that he valued them mainly because they abounded in passages that confirmed his loyalty to God as above both Pope and Church. For all passages—of which there are many—exalting the priest are ignored, and only those selected which echoed his loyalty to his moral ideal. If the Bible had been confined to the prescriptions of ritual which form so considerable a part of the Pentateuch, or to the Rabbinical discussions which figure so largely in the Epistles, it is impossible to conceive of *Piers Plowman* as caring for it, though that would not have sealed his

<sup>1</sup> "And he sighed deeply in his spirit and saith, Why doth this generation seek after a sign? Verily I say unto you, There shall no sign be given unto this generation" (Mark viii. 12). It seems reasonable to suppose that as this is the simplest, so it is the original form of the traditional utterance. But even if we allow that, according to two passages in Matthew, the sign of the prophet Jonas was mentioned, it would appear from a comparison of the latter passages that the preaching of Jonah (Matt. xii. 41) was meant, and not his parabolic abode "in the whale's belly," which is totally incongruous with the context and obviously an addition of later days.

lips ; for certainly to Langland the Word of God was within and not without.

Or, if we turn to more secular illustrations, Kepler dared to be sure that truth would conquer falsehood because "he was strong in faith, giving glory to God." That is, he knew that the order of the world must prevail against the "little systems" of the day or age. "Eight months ago I saw the first gleam of light," said he ; "for three months I have seen the dawn ; and now for a few days I have seen the sun in full vision. I surrender myself to my inspiration. . . . I have written my book. It will be read : whether in the present age or by posterity matters little. It can wait for its readers. Has not God waited six thousand years for one to contemplate his works ?" A daring and yet humble utterance—teaching us at once the bravery of faith and the modesty of patience. There is in those words the ring of a true spiritual loyalty, which is deeper than all creeds. And perhaps the ecstasy of Kepler's faith at such a moment, when the "intellectual love of God" overmastered all other feeling, enables us better than any theological comment to spiritualise the Psalmist's words : "Thou shalt make them to drink of the river of thy pleasures."<sup>1</sup>

Now, if the pages of Church history are, for the most part, painful reading, it is largely because the teaching of the earliest Gospel tradition concerning

<sup>1</sup> I have here adapted some sentences from an earlier work of mine on *Heroes and Martyrs of Science*, published twenty-two years ago. As it is long dead and buried, the self-plagiarism may be allowed. One always feels that the use of the name "God" by men like Kepler had a prophetic significance far outranging the petty theologies of the time. The usage needs Spinoza's philosophy—not necessarily in detail, but certainly in principle—to justify it.

religion was almost totally superseded by that of the Epistles. This is not at all inconsistent with what has been previously said as to the rôle of St Paul in saving Christianity from extinction. Any near approximation to an ideal is impracticable on any large scale in every age. But as "a mixture of a lie doth often give pleasure," so the same expedient may preserve truth for future recognition. As Browning says of the artificer in too pure gold :

"he mingles gold  
With gold's alloy, and, duly tempering both,  
Effects a manageable mass, then works ;  
But his work ended, once the thing a ring,—  
Oh, there's repristination ! Just a spirt  
Of the proper fiery acid o'er its face ;  
While, self-sufficient now, the shape remains,  
The rondure brave, the liliated loveliness,  
Gold, as it was, is, shall be evermore."

This "spirt of fiery acid" may figure the modern critical spirit, at once reverent and searchingly true. But we are speaking here of times when such a spirit was inconceivable. In those days, instead of the reversion to the child's heart, with a receptivity to the fatherhood such as would refer every desire or act to the idea of God, we have the torments of remorse, the discord of the higher and lower self, the terror of judgment, the agonising effort to understand prophetic words concerning the Kingdom of God, and at last a mystic act of faith, at first trembling and uncertain, but afterwards, often, triumphant, by which the sinner casts all his burden of guilt upon an innocent victim, and, being thus united to the dying Christ, is made partaker of his resurrection, and assured of eternal life. Such a doctrine opened the way to end-



less controversies. The nature of repentance, the degree of satisfactory sorrow for sin, the various steps of preparation for baptism, the beliefs to be held as to the nature of the Redeemer, the mode in which his death saved the sinner, were all points pregnant with inevitable disputes. And as time went on each bigot became convinced that he alone held saving truth.

The evil effects of this supersession of the Gospels by the Epistles were seen, as suggested above, in two forms of corruption, which, though always to a certain degree co-existent, were manifested in very different proportions in the earlier and later Christian centuries. For while malignant strife about forms of intellectual or rather of superstitious belief predominated in the fourth and fifth centuries, strife, often ending in unbrotherly and unholy bloodshed, the Reformation, though far from allaying this insane arrogance, added a new terror in the prominence it gave to morbid self-introspection in the search for inward signs that should make the "professing Christian's" "calling and election sure." And these inward signs were to be found in compliance of the feelings with innumerable texts, each of which, without any consideration of its historical connection, was considered a touchstone of the saved state of the soul. Carlyle, in his comments on Oliver Cromwell's letter to Mrs St John, has no doubt touched with imaginative sympathy on the great Englishman's spiritual troubles. And it is very true that the "dwelling in Meshec" and in Kedar represent unsatisfied longings for a higher life, apparently unattainable, when "the eternal pole-star had gone out, veiled itself in black clouds." But we may still be unable now to rejoice in the biblical influences which twisted those unsatisfied longings into such

fantastic forms. It is needless to multiply examples. The fierce spiritual struggles of Bunyan's early life, as depicted in his *Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners*, are distinguished only by the graphic power of genius from the story of a thousand humbler pilgrims who "strove to enter in."

Enough ; in estimating the relations of the Bible and religion, while we may gladly acknowledge that the oldest Scriptures show traces of the gradual elevation of a tribal henotheism into a universal monotheism with a further outlook ; and while we fully recognise the charming transfiguration effected by Jesus of this intellectual monotheism into a religion of the heart, consisting in childlike devotion to the heavenly Father ; nay, while we still further recognise the many gleams of noble morality which brighten the New Testament,—we cannot help concluding that the Pauline Christianity was, to a large extent, a supersession of religion by theology. No doubt religion in its largest sense includes every form of spiritual excitement, from the superstitious fears associated with animism or fetishism, to the "cosmic emotion" of Pantheism. But, in its noblest form, which it takes as the association of every good impulse and aspiration with the idea of God, it was not helped but retarded, both by the Pauline doctrine of propitiation and by the Nicene Creed.

Finally, so far as the relations of the Bible and religion are concerned, it must be reiterated that, as contrasted with the vastness of humanity contemplated as a whole, and inclusive of its first humble and obscure beginnings, the extent of the influence of the Hebrew and Christian Scriptures has been almost infinitesimal. For though it has not yet been settled in the courts of science whether man first appeared in the last Tertiary or early Quaternary

geological age, it is generally agreed that he has been lord of the earth for a period to be measured by centuries of millenniums rather than by thousands of years. Yet no one, however conservative in such things, would date the first written document of Hebrew religion earlier than the supposed commission of Moses, or, say some 1450 years before the Christian era.<sup>1</sup> Therefore, some hundreds of thousands of years had elapsed, and the human race had spread and multiplied over the whole globe, before the faintest scintilla of revelation had been recorded in Bible form. There are surely few left, at least among educated people, who would attempt to qualify or minimise this glaring fact by insisting on the Hebrew folklore about the preaching of Noah, or the pious testimonies of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. But, even if this almost inconceivable simplicity should still survive, it would not much mend matters. For the origin of man is confessedly remote, and it would surely betray a lack of all sense of proportion to treat the patriarchal ministrations as a great factor in a world that had been peopled by innumerable races of men ages before Hebrew folklore or even its Chaldean matrix had begun to take form.

If we take the human race as a whole from its beginnings until now, the above consideration alone is enough to remind us that an enormous and overwhelming majority of our race not only never came under the influence of the Bible, but lived and died before its first fragments were written. But, if anyone should say that this does not much matter, because an unknown but enormous proportion of those perished generations were,

<sup>1</sup> The date is absolutely unsustainable, but for my present point I wish to admit for a moment the old assumption.

according to the theory of evolution, little better than beasts—an assumption which I should regard as a gross exaggeration—at any rate it is certain that recent research has shown that civilisation of a somewhat advanced order, and involving much moral and intellectual activity, existed amongst the Sumerians, as also in Egypt and Mesopotamia, at least six thousand or seven thousand years before our era. But by those who try to force facts into the moulds of Jewish tradition, it is often forgotten that the existence of somewhat complicated civilisations eight thousand years ago necessarily involves a preceding period of development, which can hardly have been less, and much more probably was far longer. For the first civilisation we can recognise is like an iceberg, at least in this, that its concealed bases are enormously greater than the part which rises into sight.

Think, then, of all the soul-life that is not only implied but revealed in the remains of empires flourishing before, as we are told, Abraham left Ur. The Egyptian “Book of the Dead,” as given us by scholars, may be in many respects grotesque to us. But its successive recensions go back to ages long prior to the Mosaic epoch, and whatever its absurdities, at least it shows that many generations of Egyptians were anxiously occupied with thoughts of “righteousness, temperance, and judgment to come.” Yet the Mosaic revelation was reserved for a small and then obscure tribe who, though alleged to have been resident as serfs in Egypt for several generations, had, strangely enough, entirely failed to appreciate Egyptian interest in the immortality of the soul. Surely, if there were any tangible truth in the doctrine of personal divine intervention for the deliverance of those “who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage,” the Egyptians, in their pathetic, though



blundering aspirations, had a fair claim to be among the first objects of that intervention. But so far was such a claim from being recognised, that even the voice from Sinai, addressed to their escaped serfs, absolutely ignored spiritual aspirations which those serfs, after centuries of later development, at last began to share.

To multiply such illustrations is needless. The ancient Sumerian literature, the Babylonian inscriptions, and especially the Laws of Hammurabi, a thousand years older than the Mosaic epoch, all go to show that there was a moral and spiritual life emerging with many a struggle amongst those Eastern races, which, if it had any relation at all to Bible beginnings, was rather that of teacher, example, and inspiration than that of recipient. When to all this we add the primal religious aspirations of the Aryan invaders of India, the early, but unfortunately arrested moral development of ancient China, and the implications of social and of moral culture contained in the newly unveiled remains of Cnossos, it is impossible to resist the conclusion that the slowly evolved Hebrew monotheism, notwithstanding its undeniable worth, was only an isolated, obscure, and at that time negligible peculiarity of a numerically insignificant tribe, separated by circumstances from the rest of the world. Such a conclusion does not in the least invalidate the worth which the growing Bible had for the infinitesimal minority of mankind who had access to it. But it does entirely destroy the illusion that the Bible has been the light of the world. With its position in the Christian era I have already dealt. But, in considering the relations of the Bible to religion, it was absolutely necessary to show how small has been the range of its influence compared with the immeasurable realm of Man.

## CHAPTER VIII

### THE BIBLE AND MORALS

By morals as distinguished from religion we generally mean the relations of obligation or devotion between man and man, whether taken individually or collectively. Such relations have in all ages been thought to require a religious sanction ; and, as the preceding chapter implies, I cannot agree with those who dispute this judgment of the *orbis terrarum*. Perhaps it is needless to repeat that I regard all forms of religious sanction hitherto as only more or less imperfect suggestions of the purer faith, which is still a promise of the future, though its germs lay in the animism of primeval man. But, while morals may and do depend on the religious sanction involved in loyalty to the Whole<sup>1</sup> of which we are parts, much mischief has been wrought by an impracticable refusal ever to consider morals apart from religion, and by an equally impracticable insistence not only on the

<sup>1</sup> This is not necessarily the divine Universe ; lesser wholes have served the purpose hitherto. The family, the city, the empire, the Church, the all-embracing fatherhood of God, have all evoked a loyalty which, in each case, according to the customs of different times, has manifested its identity with religion by rites and ceremonies around the household altar, or in the temples of the city's patron deities, or that of the tribal god, or has been sometimes sanctified by the higher ideal of a Holy Catholic Church.

close relationship of these two, but on the inseparability of morals and theology. This error has continually engendered prejudiced misjudgments of the conduct and character of those who differ from us in religious belief. It has also inevitably led the Christian generations to cherish an utterly exaggerated and perverse estimate of the moral differences between Christian and Pagan times.<sup>1</sup> But though there has been much exaggeration, the result of theological zeal, it can hardly be disputed that the Bible has had, on the whole, an elevating and refining influence on the morals of that limited section of mankind who have received it as God's message to them. And it is the purpose of this chapter to give an impartial review of the nature and extent of that influence, and of the causes of its unfortunate perversion.

Simple religionists who have never studied their Bible other than devotionally, or with devotional preconceptions, see in it only what they bring to it, and have no idea of the exceedingly mixed morality which pervades its pages from beginning to end. Thus, the amours of the "sons of God and daughters of men," the story of Noah's drunkenness, and the far more horrible legend of Lot and his daughters, the lying of Abraham and Isaac to Pharaoh and Abimelech, the weak and cruel conduct of Abraham to Hagar, Jacob's unspeakable treachery to his aged father, his dishonest dealings with Laban, the success of which is ascribed to the divine approval,—all these and a score of other revolting tales of pious craftiness or brutal impurity

<sup>1</sup> Dr Dill has incidentally illustrated this in his two books on Roman society in the early centuries of our era. The late Mr Lecky also, in his chapter on "the Pagan Empire" (*History of European Morals*), has clearly shown how false is the notion that philanthropy, charity, in the highest sense, and a recognition of the brotherhood of man, were entirely wanting before the apostolic missions.

and bloodshed, uncondemned by the compilers, are passed over by the pious reader with a moral indifference akin to colour blindness; and the pages containing these repulsive incidents are passionately defended as absolutely essential to the moral instruction of little children.

Nor are these relics of savagery confined to the Pentateuch. Indeed, the Book of Joshua, which, however, is now usually reckoned as an epilogue belonging to that ancient volume, has perhaps done more to stimulate among Christian peoples the worship of the "God of battles" than the Sermon on the Mount to discourage it. As to the Book of Judges, while it has much interest for the intelligent and sufficiently instructed student of the patriotic folklore and germinating superstitions of a people destined for a great spiritual mission,—its morals are simply those of a horde of savage conquerors not yet firmly settled in their new possessions, and believing themselves commanded by their tribal god to spare neither aliens nor brethren when the sacred "covenant" was concerned. It is needless to refer to other books, except to acknowledge, what only prejudice can deny, that though the morality of the later Old Testament Scriptures is always imperfect, the general tone continually rises until in some of the prophets it reaches a high degree of purity and sometimes of grandeur. But it is only necessary to mention the cases of Samuel and Agag, David and Joab, the sons of Rizpah, Elijah's slaughter of the prophets of Baal—all of which are related with obvious or implied approval,—in order to suggest the grounds on which Old Testament morality must be adjudged to be of a very mixed character.

I do not forget—indeed it is my purpose to insist—that amidst the coarse recitals of a barbarous age there are



interspersed stories or parables such as that of Abraham's intercession for Sodom, or of Balaam's unwilling obedience to conscience, which contain in germ the elements of a higher morality. All I say is that the Bible is a book of mixed morality, and this is true not only of the Old Testament, but of the New. The charm of the Synoptic Gospels is such that criticism recognises it as sacred ground, and retires in reverence, provided only that it is not required to accept beautiful but unauthenticated traditions as authoritative facts. But the spiritual romance which the Church of the Second Century so strangely admitted as a matter-of-fact gospel, and as written in extreme age by the son of Zebedee, is, in many parts, utterly wanting in the "sweet reasonableness" which characterises the earlier narratives. The opening has that sort of alluring mystery which has always captivated souls aspiring after the unknowable. The narratives, though regarded by M. Jean Reville as mere parables setting forth successively the spiritual principles embodied in the life and death of Jesus, are so written as to thrill us with an intensely human interest that is generally lacking in the Synoptic parables, if we except that of the Prodigal Son. The story of the Samaritan woman in chapter iv., for instance, concentrates within twenty-six verses an amazingly lifelike study of a childlike nature, innocently enslaved by a sectarian training,<sup>1</sup> but still open to the blessed influence of a nobler faith, though only dimly understood.<sup>2</sup> The woman's curiosity,<sup>3</sup> her childish materialism,<sup>4</sup> her artless cunning in the evasion of an awkward question,<sup>5</sup> are notes of a master in the drawing of character. And the recognition of the

<sup>1</sup> Verse 9.<sup>2</sup> Verse 25.<sup>3</sup> Verses 9, 11.<sup>4</sup> Verse 15.<sup>5</sup> Verses 19, 20.

Christ by an alien race, a recognition for which all these picturesque details are a preparation, was probably intended as a concrete vindication of that larger mission of Christianity which at the date of the obscure origin of the Book<sup>1</sup> was still disputed by the Judaising faction of the Church.

Almost equally interesting from its vivid portrayal of character is the ninth chapter, in which Christ is manifested as the light of the world. The symbolic miracle by which this conception is conveyed is wrought upon a man whose sturdiness of loyalty to his benefactor, whose shrewdness of repartee when accused, and whose unflinching courage when face to face with ecclesiastical tyranny, have been the delight and sometimes the inspiration of readers. His pathetic refrain, "He hath opened mine eyes," was, no doubt, in the prophetic soul of the author, the language of a redeemed world, rather than that of any individual subject of miracle. Yet, as in the case of the Woman of Samaria, his genius, in this respect perhaps unrivalled, invests a world-wide theophany with the intensest and most delightful personal interest. It must be obvious that the evangelist, although himself almost certainly a Jew, was contemplating with joy the future prevalence of a sincerer light of truth in which the Jewish superstition of the Sabbath would disappear as a lingering cloud is absorbed in a dry dawn. "And it was the Sabbath day when Jesus made the clay"—a clear *opus operatum*, a "manner of work," certainly included in the prohibitions of the fourth commandment

<sup>1</sup> The Fourth Gospel was probably at first passed from hand to hand in a comparatively narrow circle of "Broad Church" Christians touched by Philonism. Thus it may very well have been written early in the second century, but it certainly did not pass into general circulation till after Justin's time.

—and therefore, as in the previous case of the paralytic in chapter v., where Jesus had only directed work to be done on the Sabbath, without doing it himself, the Jews persecuted Jesus “because he had done these things on the Sabbath day.”

The blunt, reiterated, and unswerving opposition of fact to prejudice in the unsophisticated replies of the loyal soul to all condemnations of his benefactor, have a quaint and touching interest. “Whether he be a sinner or no, I know not: one thing I know, that whereas I was blind, now I see.” “Why, herein is a marvellous thing, that ye know not from whence he is, and yet he hath opened mine eyes!” The difference between the sturdy faithfulness of this man, and the poltroonery of the creature in chapter v., who, to gratify his benefactor’s persecutors, readily turned informer (v. 15), suggests that this extraordinary writer retained, amidst all his mystic speculations, an intense interest in the characters he created, and rejoiced in depicting differences of moral weakness and strength. Thus, while he kept steadfastly to his plan of a new gospel which should emphasise the incarnation of the Logos and his manifestation as the light of the world and the diviner life of man, all being consummated by the eternal Passover which cancelled the Mosaic law, yet he never lost interest in detail, and his parabolic stories now interest us much more by their keen human touches than by any doctrinal suggestion. In fact, there is not one of the singularly vivid stories in the book which fails to touch the noblest motives either in reason or emotion.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> The passage about the woman taken in adultery (viii. 1-11) is, of course, an interpolation, and the Leicester cursive inserts it in another gospel; but it obviously belongs to the earliest traditions.

But very different is the case of the mystical discourses, interspersed with bitter wrangles, by which the lessons of the beautiful stories are supposed to be applied. For surely it is impossible, without a haunting sense of unreality, to apply Matthew Arnold's phrase of "sweet reasonableness" to the provocation of opponents by violent paradox, so characteristic of the arguments, or to the bitter reproaches hurled against those opponents because the paradoxes were not received as obvious divine truth. What a stupendous contrast there is between the sunny Beatitudes, or even the simple and self-interpreting paradoxes of the Sermon on the Mount, and the dark, forbidding, arbitrarily obscure enunciations in the Fourth Gospel! "I say unto ye, that ye resist not evil." Well, it is surely a natural paradox, suggested by a strong repugnance to the prevalent code of vengeance—"An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth." But it easily resolves itself into a change of spirit from the old hatred of foes to a wish for their good equally with our own.<sup>1</sup> But what could unprepared Rabbis and their disciples possibly make of the dark sayings so improbably attributed by the Fourth Gospel to Jesus almost at the beginning of his ministry? "My Father worketh hitherto, and I work!" It may be easy enough now for us to see in these words a daring anti-sabbatarian denial of the tradition that God's Sabbath after the six days' creation was an age-long rest. But if it had been uttered under the circumstances detailed in the narrative, it would have been a very dark saying, and scarcely calculated to begin an amicable discussion. And if, as we are told in a

<sup>1</sup> If St Paul was familiar with the Synoptic tradition—a doubtful point—he took a very sensible view of this paradox, as witness Acts xvi. 37; xxiii. 17, etc.; xxvi. 29.



previous discourse, "God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world," the following discussions with the Jews are singularly discordant with that saying. For every one of them bristles with provocation, and inevitably incites a proud and prejudiced people to reject with anger the supposed message of salvation. "Ye are of your father the devil, and the lusts of your father ye will do" (viii. 44). This may or may not have been true, but in any case the words were hardly in accord with the Beatitude, "Blessed are the peacemakers."

The truth is that these discussions are wholly unhistorical, and existed only in the imagination of the unknown writer, who considered them necessary to elucidate his idea of a Logos-Messiah. The strong opposition of the Judaizing faction of the Church to any such conception probably wrought in his mind a resentment which led him to represent the original forefathers of that faction as the bitterest and most hopeless enemies of the Christ. To such a mood the heat of the imagined debates was a matter of course. But our point at present is their bearing upon morality, and it is difficult to conceive that the judgment of completely emancipated opinion in the future can be other than adverse. How much of intolerance, how much of bigotry, how much of the Church's tyrannous demand for slavish submission of the reason on pain of damnation may be owing to these wrangling discussions in the Fourth Gospel, we can never accurately know. But they certainly set the example of an imperious demand for instant acceptance of vague, indefinable, impalpable, unverifiable assertions, and that on pain of hell.

The reason why the imperious and intolerant attitude often assumed by the ideal speaker in these disputes has failed to strike Christian readers generally as irreconcil-

able with the lovely character predominant in the Synoptic Gospels, is perhaps that such painful words as those quoted above were always justified by the assumption that a supernatural Being, about to mount the judgment seat of the world, might well speak with severe authority.<sup>1</sup> But it was forgotten that "the Jews"—as they are continually called in the book—did not recognise this supernatural character, and though I have no wish to defend them, seeing they were as cantankerous as obstructives of progress know how to be, still, accepting the apparent chronology of the narrative, there was some excuse for their hesitation to admit so extraordinary a claim within a few months of its being made.<sup>2</sup> And to an impartial judgment it can scarcely appear reasonable that the natural objection of "the Jews" to open contempt for their Sabbath superstition should be met only by mystical utterances which they could not possibly be expected to understand.

It may be worth while to notice the different aspects in which the story of the treacherous paralytic appeared to two of the greatest preachers of the Church's Silver Age, Augustine and Chrysostom. To the former, bent only on the spiritualisation of every sentence at all costs, the base action of the healed man offered no difficulty whatever ;

<sup>1</sup> The difference between these so-called Johannine passages and denunciations in the Synoptics, such as Matt. xxiii., etc., is that the latter were such as any prophet might utter without pretending to any other authority than that of right against wrong. The principles maintained were impersonal ; but in the Fourth Gospel the offence of the interlocutors is a personal one ; they would not recognise the supernatural dignity asserted.

<sup>2</sup> True, the Fourth Gospel has visits to Jerusalem of which the Synoptics know nothing (*cf.* ii. 23), but if we take its chronology from itself, "the Jews" in the capital cannot have had much opportunity of hearing the doctrine of Jesus before the miracle of Siloam in chapter v.

for the betrayer's only object was to preach the Gospel.<sup>1</sup> " 'He went away, and told the Jews it was Jesus who had made him whole.' He proclaimed, but they raged. He preached their salvation ; they did not seek their salvation." But the poor creature who had been rebuked for carrying his bed on the Sabbath, and from whom the name of his abettor in the crime had been so sternly demanded, knew very well that what "the Jews" wanted was the temporal perdition of his healer. Surely it is not going too far to say that before a mind like Augustine's could have been so benumbed to the moral issues involved, it must have been wholly saturated with non-moral theological speculations which relegated ethics to a secondary place. Nor are we in the least debarred from such criticism by our own belief that the whole story lies in imagination's realm. For if we may debate the real or feigned madness of Hamlet, or the contrast between moral exhortation and conduct in Polonius, certainly we may scrutinise with interest the moral characteristics of the actors in this greater spiritual tragedy. And besides, of course, both Augustine and Chrysostom were assured that they were dealing with actual historical events.

Very different, however, was the effect of this narrative upon Chrysostom. We have already noted the deep humanity of this greatest of preachers, and are not surprised to find that the conduct of the paralytic man puzzled and apparently pained him. Of course, as an orthodox divine, he had his explanation ; but it was not—if I may say so with respect—so absurd as Augustine's, and it is only with an effort that he is content therewith. After dwelling upon the probable spiritual effect of the

<sup>1</sup> "Non fuit piger in evangelizando quem viderit," Augustini, *Opera*, tome iv., p. 428 A, Benedictine edition.

words uttered by Jesus when he met the restored man in the Temple—"Sin no more, lest a worse thing come unto thee"—Chrysostom tells us that it was in the frame of mind stimulated by such words that the man went to "the Jews." "For he did not say, 'This is he who said take up thy bed'; since that was the specious accusation which they pressed against (Jesus); but he always keeps the defence to the front, and reminds them of his healing power<sup>1</sup> in his zeal to win over and reconcile the opponents (those others). For he was not so unfeeling as after such a benefit and such a warning to betray his benefactor, and to give this message with treacherous intent. For, indeed, if he had even been a beast, if he had been some inhuman creature or made of stone, such a benefit and such an awe must have restrained him. Besides, he had the threat fresh in memory, and would have been afraid of some worse thing befalling him, since he had had effective proof of the might of his healer. Still further, if he had intended betrayal, he would have been silent about the healing, while he would have told of the transgression, and condemned it. But it is not so; it is not so! On the contrary, his words were marked by boldness and loyalty; and he proclaims his benefactor with no less (zeal) than the blind man did. For what does the latter say? 'He made clay and anointed mine eyes.' Just so does this man."<sup>2</sup>

Every reader must judge for himself of the effectiveness of Chrysostom's defence. But at any rate it must be conceded that he shows more sensitiveness to the moral issue than Augustine does. Our point, however, is simply that the Fourth Gospel tended to subordinate plain moral

<sup>1</sup> πάλιν τὸν ἰατρὸν δῆλον ποιῶν.

<sup>2</sup> Chrysostom, Benedictine edition, tome viii. p. 218.



issues to the prevalence of theosophical lore, and that this tendency was found to be irresistible even by the greatest of the Church's priests. Far be it from me to deny that there are other phases of the influence of this Gospel which are so precious that the world, no less than the Church, would be loth to lose it. But if we would truly estimate the relation between the Bible and morals, we must keep an open ear to the discords as well as to the harmony with the moral ideal of the "choir invisible," the resultant of all the best feelings of the noblest hearts. The aim of this Fourth Gospel, however, was only incidentally moral. For certainly its chief purpose was to declare, whether men would hear or no, the transfigured doctrine of the eternal Christ, which was revealed in the soul of the writer through a visionary combination of the traditional Jesus with an adapted idea of the Platonic and Philonic Logos of which his knowledge was probably indirect.

The resultant suggests the work of a peculiar genius, perhaps unparalleled in kind in all the literature of the world. And I should be sorry for myself if I were unsusceptible to the art, which against a background of eternity depicts a tragedy of time inseparable from its background, but mingling all tones of temporal light and shade, and working into the picture the most varied touches of vivid human interest, all converging on the dread but glorious catastrophe, which withdraws all thought and interest from petty temporal types of God, and engrosses all other forms of devotion in the worship of the eternal Christ. I may be told, indeed, that all this is unreal ; for I have admitted that the book is a spiritual romance. But Jesus as described in the Synoptic narrative appears to have thought that the deepest spiritual truths

required pictorial fiction for their expression. And the commanding spiritual genius of this belated gospel followed him at least in that.

Nor let it be thought that this recognition of the spiritual power of a nameless prophet is at variance with the tenor of this treatise. For an accurate estimate of the relations of Man and the Bible must needs assign full value to that mystic sense of our kinship with the Infinite which an affected but unreal materialism can never destroy. Thus those of us who most frankly recognise that all present theologies must merge in the final truth that infinite God is another name for infinite Universe, may yet have some sympathy for the doctrine of the eternal Christ. That is to say, while we try to bring our little consciousness into practical and moral relation with the All in all, we like at least to picture to ourselves a "mediator"—not a separate being, indeed—but a finite mode of the Infinite, which we can realise. And this finite mode we find to be our true self. Nor is this a mere paradox. For the self, blinded and baffled by passions, is not the true self. But it is precisely that false self which disguises the Universe ; and the true self, freed from passion, which reveals it. To this true self birth, re-birth, divine light and life, opposition of the "world," crucifixion, resurrection, eternal life, all have a meaning, though it is not the meaning of the sects. And when we realise that meaning we are grateful for the Fourth Gospel.<sup>1</sup>

The chief interest of the Book of Acts is found in its reminiscences—whether minutely historical or not matters

<sup>1</sup> I take this to be *generally* the meaning attached by the Rev. R. J. Campbell to the "eternal Christ," but he might desire to see it expressed otherwise.

little—of the early passion of faith which moved mountains and laid firm the foundations of the “City of God.” The inspiration of plain men to face the fetish-mongers whom they had dreaded, to “obey God rather than man,” moves us yet when we read the story. The portentous daring of Stephen, who plainly prophesied a larger faith than even the day of Pentecost had revealed, and who, in his rapture at the prospect, blenched not—

“Tho’ cursed and scorned, and bruised with stones,”

is, as Tennyson recognised, an example that stirs us yet. That Saul of Tarsus was moved by Stephen’s death and eventually took up his work of evolving an elaborate and non-Judaic Christianity out of the memories of Jesus, is as probable, or, perhaps, more probable, than any other theory of the beginnings of the Pauline missions. And there is surely in that extraordinary man’s overpowering passion of devotion a fascination which can never lose its charm so long as the mystery of selfless heroism touches the heart of man. A book containing such memoirs must always be inspiring in the sense of stimulating a desire to live beyond ourselves. But this acknowledgment does not necessarily imply that in morality it is always a safe guide.

The deaths of Ananias and Sapphira are always assumed to be a work of divine vengeance, and therefore beyond question. But the time has gone by when that assumption can be allowed, or when such an “act of God” can be regarded as in accordance with the divine order.<sup>1</sup> The

<sup>1</sup> It is useless to refer to deaths by lightning, earthquake, plague, or pestilence as analogous “acts of God.” In the first place, they are not “acts” at all, in the ordinary sense, but incidents in the life of the Universe, without which it would not be perfect as it is; and next, these

pretence and the lie by which it was maintained are indeed a painfully apposite illustration of the corruption always incidental to collective religious enthusiasm. But that does not in the least justify the severity of the sentence, which, according to the account of Sapphira's death, was pronounced by the Apostle Peter himself. And it seems impossible to doubt that this repulsive incident did, in succeeding generations, go far to reconcile a superstitious laity to the elimination of morality from theocracy in the rule of the priest. A less painful but still indefensible exercise of apostolic power for the injury of the body rather than the salvation of the soul is related in the account of St Paul's first missionary journey; for, according at any rate to modern ideas, Elymas, the sorcerer of Paphos, had as much right to oppose St Paul's doctrine as the latter had to preach it. But, according to the morality of the Book of Acts, this was not the case; and Elymas was justly punished with temporary blindness for daring to resist the conversion of his patron. Now, however mercenary his motives may have been, modern law and modern equity would concede to him the right of doing—as he thought—the best for himself. And the general ecclesiastical approval of St Paul's miracle of vengeance upon him is only another instance of the influence of this book in eliminating morality from the jurisdiction of the priest.

I shall not attempt, where so many more learned than I have failed, to separate truth from error in the confused accounts given in Acts and Galatians of the council

events have no such reference to human conduct as is alleged in the case of Ananias. In the latter case God is supposed to go out of his way to kill a man for an offence for which excommunication would have been an ample penalty.



called in Jerusalem to consider the unprecedented procedure of St Paul among the Gentiles. But, at any rate, it is clear that the so-called decree in Acts xv. 29 was never observed. For in 1 Cor. St Paul feels called upon to offer his advice on the very questions there supposed to be closed—the eating of meat offered to idols and of blood—and his advice is much more liberal than could possibly be consistent with the alleged decree. “Whatsoever is sold in the shambles, that eat, asking no question for conscience sake” (1 Cor. x. 25). But as they were certainly not Jewish shambles, this involved eating blood. With regard to things offered to idols, the question is more complicated. The apostle sees no harm in eating them; but if attention is called to the fact that they have been so consecrated, then he thinks Christians should abstain, not on their own account, but for the sake of the idolaters, who might misunderstand their act (1 Cor. x. 27). Now one of two things is certain, if St Paul wrote this epistle, as I think he did: either he had never heard of the “decree,” or he set it at nought. In either case it follows that the passage in Acts xv. describing the compromise is only the first amongst an endless series of ecclesiastical makeshifts in which a false peace has glossed over a fundamental schism. But such pretences do not favour a high moral tone.

The quarrel between Paul and Barnabas about their fickle follower, John Mark, need not involve any reproach to either of them, considered as ordinary men of the world. But when the writer tells us “the contention was so sharp between them that they departed asunder one from the other,” he suggests a sort of hot temper scarcely consistent with that “sweet reasonableness” of brotherly love which, as we shall have to note again, was

a pre-eminent and distinctive characteristic of the earliest Christianity amongst its numerous Oriental competitors for spiritual dominion. On the other hand, the spirited conduct of Paul in refusing a clandestine release from the Philippian gaol, and in demanding the attendance of the erring magistrates, which amounted practically to an apology, is gratifying to the natural man, while it shows that, according to its chief apostle, the rule of love was never intended to cancel the rule of right.

Whether St Paul ever addressed an audience of "Epicureans and Stoicks" on the Areopagus may be an open question ; but if he did, and used anything like the words attributed to him, those philosophers must have been very much astonished to hear that they supposed "the Godhead" to be "like unto gold or silver, or stone graven by art and man's device." But we are more concerned with the rhetorical art or trick by which he forced into his argument an inscription on one among several altars in Athens "to an unknown god" ; the truth being that in bygone times, when the inhabitants of a street or district had suffered from some divine act which they could not assign to any particular deity by name, they tried to make sure of propitiation by setting up an altar to "an unknown god." St Paul, if he was as well instructed as his native university town was able to make him, must have known this. But his principle of "being all things to all men" removed all scruple about the use of what to others than the philosophers in his audience might seem a telling point. Supposing the words to be genuine, and not, as is more probable, a happy thought of the editor, I cannot think that they set a high example to the pulpit rhetoric of the future. For the weakness of that rhetoric has always been the

readiness to sacrifice rigorous veracity for the sake of winning attention and sympathy in an appeal.

But the most unpleasant incident, from a moral point of view, in St Paul's career as narrated in the Acts, was what the old Puritans would have called his "occasional conformity" for the purpose of conciliating the Jews, whose sectarian souls were enraged by his work among the Gentiles. The unhappy weakness of the apostle in yielding, like too many other reformers, to the wily suggestions of compromise, pressed on him by far inferior men, during his final visit to Jerusalem, has been variously viewed by his admirers according as they considered him uniformly infallible or no. It is to the credit of John Knox's sturdy intellect that when the rightness of "occasional conformity" was pressed upon him by this very case, he replied that he could never satisfy himself that St Paul on that occasion acted under the guidance of the Spirit. And no wonder. For consider the language of the story. James—said to have been the brother of Jesus—and the weak brethren around him were terrified at the rumours going about, and eagerly adopted the cunning plan of St Paul's ostentatious participation in certain superstitious rites; comforting their victim with the assurance that thus "all may know that those things whereof they were informed concerning thee are nothing, but that thou thyself walkest orderly and keepest the law."

It is not necessary for me to decide whether this story of conscious hypocrisy is true in fact or not; and for this reason, that I am treating of the relation of the Bible, as it stands, to morals, and not of the actual St Paul, who may have been entirely guiltless of this pretence. Certainly it is not what we should expect from the man

who wrote the well-known passage in Gal. ii. 11 : " But when Peter was come to Antioch, I withstood him to the face, because he was to be blamed. For before that certain came from James, he did eat with the Gentiles : but when they were come, he withdrew, and separated himself, fearing them which were of the circumcision " ; precisely the fear which was urged on Paul himself by James and his colleagues. " And the other Jews dissembled likewise with him, insomuch that Barnabas also was carried away by their dissimulation. But when I saw that they walked not uprightly according to the truth of the Gospel, I said unto Peter before them all, If thou, being a Jew, livest after the manner of the Gentiles, and not as do the Jews, why compellest thou the Gentiles to live as do the Jews ? " Observe, St Paul's point was that St Peter, when not in fear of the circumcision, lived " after the manner of the Gentiles, and not as do the Jews. " With what tremendous force could the former apostle's words have been used against himself if in Jerusalem he weakly gave way to the fear of the circumcision, under the instigation of James ! If he did do it, this is the darkest blot on his reputation after his conversion. But whether he did or not, there stands the humiliating story in the alleged records of the earliest Church, a precedent and an instigation to innumerable ecclesiastical compromises with evil, whether in our struggles for emancipation from effete law, or for national education, or for freedom of thought.

If we turn to the Epistles ascribed to the authorship of St Paul, I cannot conceive how any unbiassed judgment can fail to pronounce their general moral tendency to be inspiring, purifying, and ennobling. But while premising so much, and reserving to a later page the



reasons for my own admiration, I will not conceal here that the morality of these writings has darker, or at least more dubious, shades. Passing over the terrible description of human depravity in Rom. i., which was needed as the rhetorical basis for the succeeding argument, but which the writer in ii. 14, 15 allows not to be universally true, we come to the main thesis of the epistle, that "a man is justified by faith, without the deeds of the law." Now there is a sense in which this is true ; and there are some indications in this letter or treatise that St Paul, or the writer, whoever he was, taught it in that sense. That is to say, if a man who has been a rebel against the divine order of the world<sup>1</sup> and whose passionate selfishness has wrought misery for himself and his fellows, should by any means be converted to a spirit of loyalty toward that divine order, he now tries to work consciously with that order, and not against it ; and the guilt of his sins falls away, though their consequences may have to be remedied with labour and tears.

That this was the essential meaning of salvation by faith as taught in the Epistle to the Romans, is, I think, clear from the explanation given of the reason why Abraham's faith was "imputed to him for righteousness." That reason is very simple, for Abraham's faith actually *was* righteousness. "He staggered not at the promise of God

<sup>1</sup> It is easy to sneer at this phrase when we take the order of the world as static and not dynamic, as stationary and not progressive. "Nature red in tooth and claw" is a favourite allusion of those who think, with the Spanish king, that if they had been consulted at the "creation" of the world they could have given a valuable hint or two. But the dynamic divine order is that of evolution working upward through the beast to man, through force to reason, through so-called "natural selection" to self-sacrifice, mutual devotion, and socialism. The deeper questions involved cannot be treated here ; but in the *Handbook to Spinoza's Ethics* I have tried to show how they are treated there.

through unbelief, but was strong in faith, giving glory to God." Eliminate the traditional Hebrew theology which is here not at all of the essence of the position, and what is left is a much-tried man's loyalty to the divine order of the world, and a determination to work consciously with it, not against it. But that is surely the root and indeed the substance of all righteousness.

Now let us take a case from modern poetry, a case which illustrates the same doctrine of salvation by loyalty to the divine order, though it is stated from a very different point of view. Coleridge's *Ancient Mariner* is in a state of misery until he can love; but with that blessed experience comes his salvation. And that blessed experience is engendered by a sudden perception of beauty in the world. In the utmost depth of his depression a vision appears to him, not of heaven, but of the ordinary world :—

"By the light  
of the moon he  
beholdeth God's  
creatures of the  
great calm."

"Beyond the shadow of the ship  
I watched the water snakes :  
They moved in tracks of shining white,  
And when they reared, the elfish light  
Fell off in hoary flakes.

Within the shadow of the ship  
I watched their rich attire ;  
Blue, glossy green, and velvet black,  
They coiled and swam ; and every track  
Was a flash of golden fire.

"Their beauty  
and their happi-  
ness."

"He blesseth  
them in his  
heart."

O happy living things ! No tongue  
Their beauty might declare :  
A spring of love gushed from my heart,  
And I blessed them unaware :  
Sure my kind saint took pity on me,  
And I blessed them unaware.

"The spell be-  
gins to break,"

That self-same moment I could pray :  
And from my neck so free  
The Albatross fell off, and sunk  
Like lead into the sea."

The side notes of the poet as given above fully justify me in quoting these lines as a description of the restitution in a desperate soul of that loyalty or faith which brings salvation. No matter about the details of the imaginative setting. No matter that the vision of beauty is limited and apparently accidental. The "kind saint" is as easily eliminated from the story as the Hebrew tribal God from the above story of Abraham. The point is that the mariner's heart warms to the world ; he feels love ; and love involves trust and hope. He feels himself in harmony with God ; and this is the consummation of salvation by faith. So likewise when the imagined Abraham of the Epistle to the Romans "staggered not through unbelief, but was strong in faith, giving glory to God," this is only a theological way of describing loyalty to the divine order. The vision of beauty is absent, though perhaps the hope that in him "all generations should be blessed" is something better. But in either case, whether the stimulus was a sense of happy beauty in the world, or the hope of being a benefactor to all mankind, the soul yielded loyalty to the divine order, and each afforded an illustration of the only moral sense we can attach to salvation by faith.

But as is usually the case with novel or freshly stated doctrines that evoke enthusiasm, this notion of salvation by faith was pushed to extremes, and then presented in perverted forms to which no moral value can possibly be attached. Thus in this very epistle the writer surely spoils a noble passage (x. 6-9) by practically defending

faith as a belief in a much disputed fact. "If thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved." Here we might, perhaps—were not the whole context against it—understand by "confessing with thy mouth the Lord Jesus" an adoption of the morality of the Synoptic Gospels. And in such a method of salvation there might be reason enough. But the notion that mere belief in the resuscitation of a dead man—however great and good—can make all the difference between salvation and perdition, seems an arbitrary, perverse, and unreal proposition, which strikes upon us as an unexpected side billow on a labouring barque, and knocks us out of all our moral bearings. For it is not positively moral to believe on evidence an event like that, and it is immoral to believe it without ; though, of course, it may be said that this belief in the resurrection of Jesus gives access to the Christian life : and it is this which saves. But, in the first place, thousands have lived the Christian life, in the moral sense, while entirely disbelieving the bodily resurrection of Christ. And, in the next place, that interpretation is not given by the author of the epistle himself. No ; for him a sincere belief that a questionable event has happened is a sure passport to salvation. Now, such a doctrine is in moral tone immensely below the explanation given of Abraham's faith, and illustrates how biblical writers shared the infirmity of unconsecrated members of the craft, who, having got what seems to them a good idea, write it to death.

But worse than this followed. For the writer of the Epistle to the Romans, and I doubt not St Paul himself, even if he was not that writer, felt a difficulty in accounting for the strange fact that the kinsmen and fellow-



countrymen of Jesus, with comparatively few exceptions, rejected salvation by faith, while so many of the Gentiles were attracted by it, that, for the present at any rate, the hopes of the Church lay with the second and not with the first. To explain this paradox he had recourse to the doctrine of election, familiar, at least in the form of predestination, to the Pharisees and to various sects of philosophers in a previous age. Thus, both Ishmael and Isaac were, presumably, according to the custom of those prehistoric times, equally legitimate sons of the father of the faithful. But Ishmael was excluded from the inheritance of Abraham's faith, while Isaac was chosen to continue it. Again, Jacob and Esau were brought into the world at one birth, yet, "the children being not yet born, neither having done any good or evil, that the purpose of God according to election might stand, not of works, but of him that calleth—it was said unto her, The elder shall serve the younger. As it is written: Jacob have I loved, but Esau have I hated,"—a mysterious choice indeed, as the writer of the epistle, to do him justice, seems painfully to have felt. And the point to be made by this laborious quotation of legendary lore is that, in accordance with previous precedents, God has now chosen the Gentiles to be the spiritual heirs of Abraham, while the natural heirs are, for a time at least, ignored.

In this exposition of the paradoxical transference of Messiah's kingdom from the chosen people to the uncovenanted Gentiles, moral considerations are entirely put on one side, and "the purpose of God according to election" is made supreme. Now, it would ill become those who believe in a universal and divine order, independent of human caprice, to condemn as wholly false this reference of certain puzzling events to the sovereign

will of God. But what revolts us is the apparently exceptional nature of the election taught; for it is not a universal divine order, but "an election of grace." That is, it is concerned with the "plan of salvation," or the fulfilment of prophecy, or the establishment of the kingdom of Christ. But, as to all human affairs outside this "election of grace," the tone of the epistle is consonant with the words attributed to St Paul in his missionary addresses: "The times of this ignorance God overlooked" (Acts xvii. 30); "Who in the generations gone by suffered all the nations to walk in their own ways" (xiv. 16). Nor does the following context of the latter passage in the least affect my contention that the "election of grace" is exceptional—a sort of Gulf Stream amidst the weltering chaos of the pre-Christian world. For though God "left not himself without witness," that witness was made at last effective only in and by "the election of grace."

But divine order is universal; and Jesus himself recognised that it regulated the rising of the sun, the descent of the rain, the fall of the sparrow, and the numbering of the very hairs of our head. Christianity, however, left it to philosophers, and especially to one of Jewish race, born late in the Christian centuries, to show how the real divine order, eternal, all-embracing, all-permeating, directing the thoughts of a Shakespeare as well as the dust eddies on a summer road, is not only consistent with, but is essential to, the noblest morals. With that grand doctrine, however, we are not concerned here,<sup>1</sup> except to suggest that it contrasts favourably with

<sup>1</sup> But I may refer to my *Handbook to the Ethics of Spinoza* (Archibald Constable & Co., Ltd.), in which I endeavour to show that the spontaneity of actions rising from the true self fully compensates for the surrender of an impossible, causeless action or personal caprice.

the partial and capricious scheme of election and predestination by which the Pauline school endeavoured to account for the Gentile usurpation of the Kingdom of God. But, what is of more consequence, perhaps, is the danger which the experience of many centuries has proved so serious, that the lower interpretation of salvation by faith—that is, safety by mere belief—together with the corollaries found necessary to account for the unbelief of Israel—would relax the nerves of moral effort by an exaggerated emphasis on the exhortation we have so often heard, even in our own times, “Only believe, and you shall be saved.”

Indeed, this danger is recognised within the compass of the New Testament Canon itself. For in the epistle attributed to St James,<sup>1</sup> we find the doctrine of salvation by belief flouted and rebuked: “Wilt thou know, O vain man, that faith without works is dead?” The writer’s selection of Abraham’s projected human sacrifice as one of the patriarch’s saving works was natural enough in his day, though to us it only suggests an ancient fetishism. But otherwise he shows a surprising anticipation of the modern spirit in his total repudiation of the doctrine that belief in a supposed statement of fact could assure the believer of salvation: “Thou believest there is one God; thou doest well; the devils also believe and tremble.” Surely, on the assumption of the writer that hell foresaw the triumph of Jesus, the same incisive satire is applicable to

<sup>1</sup> If we could suppose that this plain, practical and almost non-theological epistle had been written by the James to whom Hegesippus attributed the callosities of a camel through perpetual kneeling in the Temple, it would seem a curious Nemesis that the Judaising leader who induced St Paul to play the hypocrite in Jerusalem should live to see all his schemes of compromise dissipated by the disciples of the man whom he had entrapped.

the lower conception of faith already quoted from the Epistle to the Romans : "Thou believest in thine heart that God hath raised Jesus from the dead" ; thou doest well ; "the devils also believe and tremble." Whether this was one of the Pauline peculiarities mentioned by the writer of 2 Peter as "things hard to be understood, which they that are unlearned and unstable wrest, as they do also the other Scriptures, unto their own destruction," we cannot tell. But whether wrested or not, it is certain that nothing went further to mar the sweet influences of the Synoptic Gospels and the lessons of love, purity, and noble aspiration contained in the epistles, than this unfortunate doctrine of salvation by belief. Because, as the late Mr Lecky said : "The destiny theologians represented as awaiting the misbeliever was so ghastly and so appalling, as to render it almost childish to lay any stress upon the earthly suffering that might be inflicted in extirpation of error."<sup>1</sup>

With the persecution of the early Christians by the pagan empire we have nothing to do. As Mr Lecky and others have clearly shown, it was not a persecution for belief or disbelief, but for disloyalty to certain immemorial traditions on which the safety of the commonwealth was supposed to depend. The attitude of the Roman rulers toward the Christians was very much that of Oliver Cromwell toward the Catholics : "As for the people, what thoughts they may have in matters of religion in their own breasts I cannot reach ; but shall think it my duty, if they walk honestly and peaceably, not to cause them in the least to suffer for the same ; and shall endeavour to walk patiently and in love toward them to see if at any time it shall please God to give

<sup>1</sup> *History of European Morals*, vol. i. p. 421.



them another or a better mind." But the open practice of the Roman ritual he *could* not—I do not say would not—allow, because of the inevitable political disturbance it must involve. "I meddle not with any man's conscience," he wrote to the assembled priests of Clonmacnoise ; "but if you mean a liberty to exercise the Mass, I judge it best to use plain dealing and to let you know that where the Parliament of England have power that will not be allowed of."

A miserable conclusion ! But, with due change of terms, it represents very much the attitude of the persecuting emperors toward the early Church. A government which tolerated the rites of Mithra, the worship of Isis and Serapis, and many other forms of Eastern religions entirely foreign to Rome, was not likely to be disturbed by the rise of a new Oriental sect. But the difficulty was that this new sect would not honour the ancestral gods of Rome, as all the other sects did. To the Jews, indeed, a special privilege had been allowed ; because they were supposed to have their own tribal god, and as foreigners they were allowed to confine their devotions and worship to him. But the Christians were rapidly gathering in slaves, freedmen, tradespeople, and a few men and women of higher rank. And that this increasing multitude should refuse to honour Rome's old gods even by throwing a few grains of incense on an altar was regarded as an omen pregnant with divine displeasure, and which might mean the ruin of the empire. In addition, the Church came to be regarded as a secret society such as the imperial government always suspected, and this increased the distrust and hatred excited by refusal to honour the ancient gods. If Christians could have followed in Rome the temporising policy advised by

James when the prejudices of the Jerusalemites were concerned, or if they could have followed the example of the converted Naaman, who bowed himself in the House of Rimmon, and by "occasional conformity" kept his place, no Roman emperor would have dreamed of inquiring into their beliefs.

Very different were the persecutions of Christians by Christians. For in this melancholy history, whether Gnostics, or Quartodecimans, or Nestorians, or Arians, or in their turn Trinitarians, incurred condemnation, it was simply their beliefs that constituted their crime—a crime punished in the unestablished Church by malignant excommunication and unchristian hate, but still more cruelly avenged when the established Church was able to wield the sword. While readily allowing that the Christian virtues to which we shall soon turn with relief were practised in many an obscure home during the sanguinary century that followed the Constantinian establishment of the Church, the readers, whether of the contemporary Church historians, such as Socrates, or their later interpreters, such as Milman, are often inclined to lay down the book with disgust at the repeated orgies of envy, hatred, and all uncharitableness, often merging in violence and murder, which constitute the Church history of those days. What the Paulicians suffered we have already seen, and also the fate that overtook their remote spiritual descendants in Southern France. Foxe's *Book of Martyrs* has made our childhood familiar, more or less, with the long roll of sufferers for opinion. And when Foxe fell silent, still the unutterable mischief went on. Believers in bishops persecuted disbelievers in bishops, and presbyters denounced or even murdered priests. Even in our own day, what are called the

"Blasphemy Laws" are unexpunged from the statute book; and the nineteenth century saw conscientious, earnest, and noble-minded men, full of the Christian virtue of "charity," suffer a felon's punishment because they denied that the Bible was the "word of God." I will not quote again the indignant words of Lucretius; for it was not religion that wrought these ills. No; it was the irrational and immoral doctrine, taught first apparently by St Paul, that salvation depends on "the will to believe" an unproved fact.

Nevertheless, it remains indisputably true that notwithstanding this unfortunate confusion between loyalty of soul and mere belief in an alleged fact, the first Christian missionaries did carry with them through the world not merely an odour of sanctity, but of goodness and love and "truth in the inward parts," which, in the end, sweetened even theology, and purified the air for the coming Kingdom of God or Republic of Man. I believe that mutual love, brotherhood, or "charity"<sup>1</sup> is the oldest tradition of the Church, older indeed than the imagination or myth of the Resurrection, and dating from the pre-natal state of the Church, when it existed only as a company of Christ's disciples irradiated by the boundless human love breathing through every word and manifest in every deed of their Lord. There are surely few passages in the Gospels more suggestively touching than Matt. ix. 36 and its parallel in Mark. Combining the two passages, we gather that in the course of his itinerancy, after some time of comparative seclusion with the twelve,

<sup>1</sup> I, for one, regret the adoption of "love" in the Revised Version of 1 Cor. xiii. instead of "charity." The English "love" includes *ἔρως* as well as *ἀγάπη*; but "charity," by long association with that prose lyric, has come to represent the brotherly affection which all men should have for each other.

Jesus, in the windings of his way, was suddenly confronted with a tired, wayworn multitude of the poorest Galileans, who had for many hours, or perhaps some days, been seeking him in vain. "And Jesus, when he came out"—from the mountain recess to which he had retired—"saw much people, and was moved with compassion toward them, because they were harassed, and threw themselves down,<sup>1</sup> as sheep having no shepherd: and he began to teach them many things."

The socialism of modern days has quickened the faculties which enable us to picture the scene. Not that there is any justification for supposing the lot of the Galilean peasant to have been comparable to that of the slum-dwellers in London, New York, or Chicago. But, at any rate, these seekers after the prophet had never any superfluity, and had evidently now made insufficient provision for themselves and families during the pursuit. And so there were mothers trying to hush children crying through weariness and hunger, and others nursing with self-forgetful patience the sick ones for whom the prophet's aid was craved. And there were fathers who had carried through the heat of the day an afflicted or "demoniac" son. And few, if any, were there who did not bear traces of the anxiety which must needs recur again and again when the margin of earnings beyond bare subsistence is always in danger of shrinking to a mathematical line. It is true, indeed, that no one with a genuinely human heart could be unmoved by such a spectacle—that is, no one but a despot, or a case-hardened official convinced that the glories of imperialism are well

<sup>1</sup> The Revised Version has "distressed and scattered." It is not for me to pit myself against such authority, but the marginal translation in the Authorised Version has much to support it.



worth the price of human misery. But the distinctive note of the compassion excited in the heart of Jesus was the feeling that something must be done, that the world had got to be saved, and that no suffering on his part was too great to endure for such a redemption.

Here, then, was the fount and prototype of that "enthusiasm of humanity" so justly celebrated in *Ecce Homo* as the chief practical characteristic of Christianity. And in spite of all the immeasurable mischief wrought by those passages of the Pauline writings which degrade salvation by faith into salvation by opinion, this brotherly love, this "charity" in the highest sense, has never utterly forsaken the Church, even in that Church's worst paroxysms of theological delirium. The Pauline Epistles themselves every now and then drop their theosophy and sparkle with a bright, pure love of man. The dismal chapters on election and reprobation in the Epistle to the Romans are suddenly and strangely<sup>1</sup> succeeded by a short lesson on practical morality incomparably superior to the "Ten Commandments." The principles of a sane and practicable socialism are briefly laid down by the reference to the body with many members and only one interest. Love without dissimulation is the crown of all; and the kindly affections of life are to be "human nature's daily food." But perhaps we can detect with more confidence the hand of St Paul himself in the Epistles to the Corinthians. In 1 Cor. xii. the apostle has been insisting on the beauty and practical value of the eternal principle of oneness in difference, and urging that all petty jealousies about diversities of gifts should be merged and quenched in the social spirit that makes

<sup>1</sup> So suddenly and strangely that we instinctively suspect the joining in here of some other document of a very different origin and nature.

us members one of another. But as he warmed to his work his heart glowed, and the lambent flame of that brotherly love which was the open secret of Jesus all but kindled him into song.

“Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels,  
And have not charity,  
I am become as sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal.  
And though I have the gift of prophecy,  
And understand all mysteries, and all knowledge ;  
And though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains,  
And have not charity,  
I am nothing.”

It is needless to quote the rest of this prose lyric. For our chief point is that, if not the very man, at least the same school of thought which made belief in the resurrection of Jesus a passport to heaven, here declares that not only such a belief, but even the faith of Abraham goes for nothing unless sanctified by brotherly love.

And this must be borne in mind amidst all the bewilderment caused to us by St Paul's retention of Rabbinical methods of word-play and forced allegory in his ministry of the Gospel. Nay, not even his theosophy, which is on a higher level, should obscure to us the fact that the deepest spring of his religious enthusiasm was not the supernatural glory of Jesus, but his love, and the love that it begot. For, indeed, though St Paul and his disciples wrote more even than “St John the Divine” and the Alexandrian-Ephesian school about the eternal Christ, yet, as we have seen, he counts the understanding of such mysteries as nothing unless it be sanctified by brotherly love. In many a passage of the Epistles to the Corinthians, Galatians, and Thessalonians, love rather than community of belief is seen as the bond of teacher

and taught. Even in the Epistle to the Galatians, which was apparently written to recall that fickle people to the true doctrine of salvation by faith without the works of the law, we find that among the enumerated "fruits of the Spirit" (v. 22.) love comes first, and "joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness" all take precedence of faith. However the order of thought may be explained in an epistle of such special purpose, at any rate it shows that brotherly love and its associated virtues were always near to the heart of the Apostle as the very core and substance of the Gospel. Indeed, he was to the churches more as a father or a brother than as a missionary or priest. And if we turn to the one personal letter which is probably genuine—that to Philemon—we find every verse instinct with the tender and loving relations that constituted the strongest bond of the infant Church. It is true, Christianity did not directly abolish slavery; though, by ignoring it within the communion, it made the permanence of such an institution impossible. But when a Christian apostle could write of a restored slave as his "son whom he had begotten in his bonds," and could request of the deserted master that runaway servant's reception "not now as a servant, but above a servant, as a brother beloved," the doom of slavery was already sealed.

It may of course be said with plausibility that this large charity, this brotherly love, was limited to the brethren in communion with the Church,<sup>1</sup> while if anyone neglect to hear the Church he was to be not a brother, but "a heathen man" and an alien. But in spite of the perverse com-

<sup>1</sup> The words of Matt. xviii. 17 cannot of course have been spoken by Jesus, for there was no "church"—ἐκκλησία—in the apostolic sense of the word in his day. The passage therefore represents the feeling of the age of the Epistles.

ments of Roman writers, who confounded the gloomy tribal pride of the Jews with the bright brotherly love of the Christians, there is much reason to believe that converts to the new religion were often first attracted, not only by the ardour of affection within the fold, but also by the universal charity by which the followers of the Christ sought to reflect the divine love said to be embodied in him. For it was not the Church only, but mankind at large, that the writer of the Epistle to the Romans had in view when he dwelt on the love of God for sinners, and the extension of "the righteousness of one"<sup>1</sup> to all men unto justification of life. But in later Epistles, such as cannot with any confidence be attributed to St Paul himself, yet are certainly inspired by his teaching, the doctrine of the new humanity "where there is neither Greek nor Jew, circumcision nor uncircumcision, Barbarian, Scythian, bond nor free, but Christ is all and in all," is always associated with earnest exhortations to peace, long-suffering, kindness, "and above all" charity, which is the bond of perfectness.

Even the eccentric Epistle to the Hebrews, so much taken up with profitless speculations on theosophy and a world catastrophe, after announcing that "our God is a consuming fire," immediately adds, "Let brotherly love continue. Be not forgetful to entertain strangers. . . . Remember them that are in bonds as bound with them : and them which suffer adversity as being yourselves also

<sup>1</sup> With all deference, I cannot accept the Revised Version here. The construction of *ένος δικκιώματος* ought surely to be governed by *ένος ανθρωπου παραπτώματος* in the parallel line of the verse. It was natural to drop the *ανθρωπου* in the second phrase ; it is inevitably supplied from the first ; besides, "one righteousness" hardly makes sense. The whole passage turns on the contrast between the two men—the Adam and the Christ.



in the body." The charge of a brotherly love limited to the communion of the Church is perhaps better founded in the case of the Petrine and Johannine Epistles than in that of the Pauline. But 1 Pet. ii., though its references to the outside world are comparatively cold,<sup>1</sup> yet overflows with a passion of love, and will hear of no defence against persecution other than a loyal, loving life. "For so is the will of God, that by well-doing ye may put to silence<sup>2</sup> the ignorance of foolish men." The Epistles attributed—and with much probability—to the unknown author of the Fourth Gospel, bear abundant testimony to the prevalence of an intense mutual affection among Christians in the first quarter of the second century. But these brief writings are somewhat too suggestive of the mutual feeling that binds together the members of a secret society or mystery rather than of the love of man. "Marvel not, my brethren, that the world hate you. We know that we have passed from death unto life because we love the brethren." "The brethren," observe, not the world. And in the same sense we must probably interpret the words, "He that loveth not his brother whom he hath seen, how can he love God, whom he hath not seen?" But these observations do not in the least weaken what has been said about the enormous influence of brotherly love in fostering Christianity amid the ten thousand hostile forces which threatened its earliest years. "There has probably never existed on earth," says Mr Lecky, "a community whose members were bound to one another by a deeper or purer affection than the Christians in the days of their persecution. There has probably

<sup>1</sup> *E.g.*, "Honour all men ; love the brotherhood ; fear God ; honour the king."

<sup>2</sup> *φίμωδν*, literally "muzzle" or "gag."

never existed a community which exhibited in its dealings with crime a gentler or more judicious kindness, which combined more happily an unflinching opposition to sin with a boundless charity to the sinner, and which was in consequence more successful in reclaiming and transforming the most vicious of mankind.”<sup>1</sup>

And, in spite of the bitterness of theological disputes, that spirit has survived. I have known converts from Protestantism to the Catholic communion declare that what impressed them most of all in their new surroundings was the fervour of love that breathed there. The enormous expansion of the Salvation Army has certainly been due not merely to the exceptional organising genius of its venerable founder, but also to the love for all outcasts, sufferers, and sinners with which he inspired his followers from the first. Whatever, then, may have been the defects—and they are many—in the relation of the Bible to morals, at least the Christian Scriptures, notwithstanding the terrible evils wrought by the doctrine of salvation by belief, have given to brotherly love a width and depth of interpretation which has enabled it to survive even sectarian hate, and which might yet establish “peace on earth and good-will to men.”

But this special intensity of brotherly love was not the only emphasised moral virtue that gave character to the earliest Church. I do not think it essential to my purpose to enter on any general discussion of early Church morals, or their influence upon the Roman Empire. The subject was most impartially and admirably treated by Mr Lecky in his *History of European Morals*. I can

<sup>1</sup> *History of European Morals*, vol. i. p. 450. The intolerance deprecated by Mr Lecky in the immediately following context has been fully acknowledged and explained in previous pages of the present work.

but respectfully echo his judgment, that many of the moral and humanitarian reforms usually attributed to Christianity had already been begun before the Church exerted any perceptible influence on society. Moreover, the continuance of slavery, exposure of infants, gladiatorial shows, and such like, long after the Church had gained at least an ecclesiastical dominion, suggest that the Bible had little differentiating influence. Both the growth of Christianity and the improvement of manners seem rather to have been results of the same natural process of evolution. But while it must of course be owned that this observation is true also—to a certain extent—of the virtues I have specially selected as illustrations of the best relations of the Bible and morals, it is not inconsistent to urge that, for reasons already given, the “enthusiasm of humanity” was specially indebted to the Church. And I proceed to urge that this equally is characteristic of that high loyalty to truth which Carlyle used to call veracity. For veracity in the highest sense—truth of self, truth to fact, truth to God,<sup>1</sup> truth in thought, in word and in act—had never been so insisted upon before. Catechisers are hard put to it to extort a prohibition of lying out of that most imperfect code the “Ten Commandments.” For the words, “Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbour,” evidently refer only to legal testimony before a judge, and leave wholly untouched the untruthfulness of ordinary talk, and false statement as made in business for illicit gain. Nor, if it had been in existence, would that code have interfered with the ready resort to lies by Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob whenever deceit afforded the easiest way of

<sup>1</sup> *I.e.*, the sum of all fact—but such a conception was still in the womb of the future.

escape. David is supposed to have known the Commandments. But he would have been very much surprised to hear that the ninth prohibited his convenient lie to Achish after his "road" or raid against the Geshurites, when he pretended to have attacked "the south of Judah" (1 Sam. xxvii. 10-11): "And David saved neither man nor woman alive, to bring tidings to Gath, saying, Lest they should tell on us, saying, So did David, and so will be his manner all the while he dwelleth in the country of the Philistines." So complete a massacre is improbable, perhaps impossible, when many byways of escape must have been open to the young and active. But the calm statement of the writer is worth noting as an indication that David felt himself as little debarred from unprovoked massacre by the sixth commandment, as from lying by the ninth.

Gehazi's lie has been a stock subject of deprecatory comment in many a Sunday school lesson; but the children, impressed by a sense of his wickedness, have, in proportion to their intelligence, been surprised and hurt as they grew up to find that Gehazi's moral weakness was shared by many Old Testament worthies whom they had been taught to reverence. For they find in some curious stories of Hebrew folklore that prophetic gifts are by no means inconsistent with a lying tongue.<sup>1</sup> If concordances may be trusted, the very word "truth" occurs only about sixteen times in all the Old Testament books preceding the Psalms in the order of the Authorised Version. In the Psalms it occurs with quite dispropor-

<sup>1</sup> 1 Kings xiii. 18; 2 Kings viii. 10 (where Elisha, the offended master of Gehazi, is the instigator of a lie which he knew meant murder); 1 Kings xxii. 15 (the withdrawal on pressure is no justification); but see further the whole passage, especially verses 22 and 23, where God is represented as putting a lying spirit in the mouth of all these prophets.



tionate frequency, and in many of these sacred lyrics it has a high spiritual and moral value. But the collection formed "the hymn-book of the Second Temple," and was only gradually completed ; so that in its final form, comprising five separate books, it can hardly have preceded the Christian era by more than one hundred years. We are not surprised, therefore, to find in these songs of Israel many anticipations of that devotion to truth which characterised primitive Christianity in its purest form. "*Behold, thou desirest truth in the inward parts*" (Ps. li. 6). "Lord, who shall abide in thy tabernacle? and who shall dwell in thy holy hill? He that walketh uprightly and worketh righteousness, and *speaketh the truth in his heart*" (Ps. xv. 1, 2).

It is needless to multiply examples which must be familiar to everyone. But it is of some interest to note that the word most generally used for "truth" in the Psalms and prophets is a form of the root which yields "amen," the ceremonial word with which both Jews and Christians have responded to the prayers offered in the congregation. It is, apparently, a verbal adjective,<sup>1</sup> expressive of confirmation, and it has this significance because the unmodified root means standing fast, firmness, stability. No doubt it is dangerous to infer the literary or ceremonial significance of a word from the abstract significance of its root. Still, taking into view the general usage of the word translated "truth" in the passages referred to, it seems reasonable to believe that to the latest Jews and primitive Christians it meant reality as distinguished from outward show, the divine order which cannot be shaken. I shall not here enter upon the question whether ultimate truth, that is,

<sup>1</sup> Gesenius, *sub voce*.

reality on the infinite scale, is or is not apprehensible by finite thought. For there is not the slightest need for any such discussion to enable us to appreciate the heroism with which large numbers of the early Christians endured appalling tortures and death rather than utter a word or commit a ceremonial act which would contradict their confession of Christ. Whether that confession expressed partly a relative truth and partly a historical delusion, or whether, from the point of view of philosophy and critical realisation of fact, it was wholly false, in any case the constancy of the voluntary sufferers was a noble example of veracity in this sense, that they determined at all costs to be true to themselves and to their conviction of the divine order. Now, whatever changes may have taken place in theological opinion—for even the strictest sects of Christians do not agree with those martyrs now<sup>1</sup>—the present conditions of both Church and State, which make absolute sincerity a bar to many of the most fruitful forms of public service, suggest that a touch of the martyrs' veracity would be of incalculable value in our own day.

<sup>1</sup> *E.g.*, the martyrs thought the world was speedily coming to an end; they believed in exorcism and other forms of contemporary miracle. Moreover, their ideas on baptism and the eucharist are certainly not shared now by any except the Catholics of the West and the orthodox of the East. But, while these lines are written, the appearance (15th July 1908) of the venerable Leo Tolstoy's magnificent protest against the legal murders, tortures, and imprisonments in Russia shows that human nature is as capable of veracity as ever. "It is impossible to live so! I, at any rate, cannot and will not live so! This is why I write this and will circulate it by all means in my power, both in Russia and abroad; that one of two things may happen—either that these inhuman deeds may be stopped, or that my connection with them may be snapped, and I may be put in prison, where I may be clearly conscious that these horrors are not committed on my behalf; or still better—so good that I dare not even dream of such happiness—that they may put on me as on those peasants a shroud and a cap, and may push me also off a bench, so that by my weight I may tighten the well-soaped noose round my old throat."

It is needless to give instances other than those mentioned in previous chapters. Popular Christian story is full of them; and though there has doubtless been much exaggeration, especially in regard to the number of sufferers,<sup>1</sup> the facts left unassailable after all criticism are quite sufficient to establish my point that, next after the virtue of brotherly love, the duty of veracity in word and deed was the most distinctive moral mark of the primitive Church. Not that the sense of this duty was novel. For, from Regulus to Epictetus, Roman story has constantly recurrent gleams of the heroism it can inspire. And though the Greeks, notwithstanding the Stoics, were for the most part of a softer texture, Socrates was not alone in his indifference to death when veracity was concerned. Further, the fierce fanaticism of the Jews after their law had become a fetish, produced a sort of heroism which we cannot but respect, though it was more like the martyrdom of hate than the martyrdom of love. We are not here dealing with modern times, but we cannot forget that the Babi sect in Persia has shown many noteworthy points of resemblance to the evolution of Christianity, especially in the almost incredible power of voluntary endurance which their spiritual veracity has inspired.

But it can scarcely be denied that the “cloud of witnesses” who drowned in their blood the rage of anti-Christian persecutors, were characterised by an enthusiasm of veracity keener and more exalted than that of most other devotees. The traditional Roman heroes, such as

<sup>1</sup> The late Mr Lecky, in his *History of European Morals*, has given at the end of his first volume perhaps the most moderate, impartial, and accurate estimate of the extent and nature of the persecutions. Gibbon was certainly not impartial.

Scævola and Regulus, in their brave adhesion to their mission or their word, were actuated by manly honour. But the Christian motive was as far above the sentiment of honour as true self-sacrifice is above pride. The death of Socrates stands alone ; and in his cheerful indifference to everything but truth, as well as in the courage that faced an unknown beyond, he compels a sympathetic admiration such as we cannot accord to a fanatic like Ignatius of Antioch, bent on a glorious passage to supreme bliss. Yet, in one respect at least, the devotion of most of the Christian martyrs closely resembled that of Socrates, in that it was voluntary, in the sense that they could easily have escaped had conscience allowed. For the sympathy of the magistrates was often with them rather than with their accusers, and the sprinkling of a few grains of incense on an altar fire before the Emperor's effigy would have secured life and ease. The modern spirit would readily have interpreted that as a ceremony of political homage rather than as a religious act. In the case of Polycarp, it was apparently the utterance of a prescribed formula with an unexpected tone and application that doomed him to death. "Have pity on thy grey hairs," pleaded the presiding proconsul. "At least say, 'Down with the atheists !' 'Down with the atheists !'" cried the sturdy old man, turning toward the mob in the arena, and waving his hand toward them. It is said also that he lifted his eyes to heaven, and sighed, as though lamenting their spiritual fate. But his traditional discourtesy to Marcion, whom he is said to have hailed as "the first-born of Satan," makes it probable that, while sternly truthful, he was comparatively insensible to the kindlier graces of his Master's character, and to the lessons of St Paul on universal brotherly love.



Perhaps the large and lofty motives associated with the veracity of the noblest martyrs lift them above the rank of mere witnesses on behalf of new theological doctrines, and thus differentiate them from the heroic enthusiasts of the Babi sect. For though the unexpected delay of Christian hopes, together with the degradation of faith into mere belief, led to a total transformation and deformation of the Church's original life, there can be no doubt that Christ's religion, in its earliest form, involved a certainty that the kingdom of God was at hand. But in the absence of any human sovereign—for Christ himself was to "deliver up the kingdom to God, even the Father"—this kingdom of God was equivalent to the republic of man, the universal establishment of liberty, equality, and brotherhood amongst all races of mankind.<sup>1</sup> It is only reasonable to think that so grand an outlook imparted a distinctive nobility to the steadfastness of martyrs for the Christian faith.

The melancholy records of Church history after the stimulus of persecution was removed, and the mean intrigues in which thousands of churchmen have been engaged ever since for the acquisition of place and power and wealth, at any cost of hypocrisy and lies, might seem to prove that this inspiration of veracity was short-lived in itself and barren of indirect results. But this would be a very imperfect judgment. For the most prominent

<sup>1</sup> It is true that in 1 Cor. xv., which I have quoted above, the consummation is that "God may be all in all" (verse 28). But it is not as a monarch that God can be all in all. I do not suppose that St Paul was ever, even in his most aberrant moments, a conscious Pantheist, but he said things that implied Pantheism, and this is one of them. As to the universal socialistic republic of Man, see Rom. xiv. 7-17; Col. i. 20, iii. 10, 11; Eph. ii. 14-32, iii. 14-21, iv. 13. Several of these passages are meaningless if they do not suggest the idea of a universal socialistic commonwealth of Man.

dignitaries of the Church have rarely been true expositors of its life. And this duty of loyalty to truth at any cost has again and again seized on the consciences of humble sectaries, Paulicians, Albigenses, Lollards, and later Protestants, to whom to be a living lie was more intolerable than death by fire. It must be confessed, indeed, that the religious rebellions which generated this spirit were often wanting in that "most excellent gift of charity," which was the prime and all-moving virtue of the earliest Church. Nevertheless, the primeval tradition of brotherly love could not be wholly erased by the sternness of a pure veracity. And now, in modern days, when the Pauline corruption of faith into opinion is being drastically corrected by the destruction of supernatural beliefs, the solvent of veracity which has sapped those beliefs is found equally to dissolve away rotten relics of feudalism, the subordination of the many to the few, the recklessness of selfish profit-grabbing, and the barriers that give us divided classes instead of one brotherhood. I for one have no fear that socialism can ever destroy or ignore the individuality essential to man. But if it sticks to truth and avoids shams, it can, at least, revive that glorious dream of the Pauline school of one new manhood renewed in knowledge.

Amidst the false issues raised between religion and science during the last century, one debt of science to religion was too often overlooked, and that was the enthusiasm for truth. For, notwithstanding the ample confession already made of the hypocrisies induced by the substitution of belief for faith or loyalty of soul, and also by the political establishment of religion, it still remains certain that the original Christian enthusiasm of veracity outlived such corruptions, and like an underground

stream of living water every now and then sparkled into the light of day. At any rate, it is a fact that the pioneers of science, in the darkest age, and some of its heroes in later days, were men of religion, and may be credited with a religious obedience to the apostolic injunction to follow "whatsoever things are true."

Roger Bacon, one of the most premature of the prophets of science, did not indeed enter the monastic life till he had reached middle age ; and happier would it have been for him, perhaps, if he had died a layman. But at any rate he thought that the cloister would afford him the best opportunities for pursuing truth. And though he was cruelly disappointed, his fate does not contradict, but rather confirm my contention that the primitive Christian enthusiasm for veracity reappeared from time to time in the heroes and martyrs of science. For the whole tone of his writings suggests a reverent and devout soul to whom truth and God were one. Galileo, however much science owes to him, fails to illustrate our present point. For we do no injustice to his memory if we say that he was inspired rather by love of knowledge than of truth. And though none of us may be sure enough of our own courage to think of his recantation with any feeling but one of reverent sympathy, yet the legendary muttering of "*e pur si muove*," even if it were true, could not rank him with the martyrs for truth.

Copernicus, a Canon of the Church, and Galileo's predecessor, was never put to the proof. For, with the reticence of genuine science, he delayed the publication of his imperfect theory of the solar system for some thirty years after he had formed it. And perhaps, fortunately for himself, he was on his deathbed when the

book at last appeared. But, at any rate, his laborious study of planetary movements, and his rejection of the cycles and epicycles of the old astronomy, justify us in attributing to him some share in the apostolic aspiration after "whatsoever things are true." Much more illustrious by his enthusiasm for veracity was Giordano Bruno, another churchman of the sixteenth century, who dared to do for the Copernican theory what its author did not live to do himself. He was of sterner stuff than Galileo, and added to his astronomical heresy the still worse guilt of protest against the received theology. His murder by fire in 1600 is one of the blackest records of ecclesiastical wickedness. It is some consolation that his heroism was undoubtedly inspired by that love of truth for its own sake which primitive Christianity had taught.

The case of Kepler is more complex ; for he frankly confesses to "drawing up almanacks with predictions" in which he did not believe, and defends his conduct on the ground that "it is more honest than to beg his bread." On the other hand, when threatened by local conflicts between Catholic and Protestant he wrote : "I am a Christian attached to the Augsburg Confession by an earnest examination of the doctrine . . . and I do not know how to play the hypocrite. Religion is for me a serious matter which I dare not treat with lightness." Such an utterance is borne out by the religious fervour with which in words already quoted he proclaimed his new revelation of the laws of planetary motion. Surely such a spirit is in the direct line of descent from the brotherhood of simplicity and truth that formed the first nucleus of the Church. The less known case of a Dominican monk, Thomas Campanella, born in 1568, a native of Calabria, offers perhaps the closest parallel which



the story of science can show to the unconquerable endurance of the Christian martyrs. His ideas evidently inclined to Pantheism.<sup>1</sup> But be that as it may, neither sevenfold tortures of the rack, nor other devilries of the Inquisition, could extort from his lips a lie, nor could twenty-five years of imprisonment subdue his loyalty to truth. Yet he lived after all to see his writings published.<sup>2</sup> Let us hear some words from his preface, for they form a fitting conclusion of the whole matter so far as this part of our argument is concerned :—

“ Not with the hope of gain have I written, as do most, but persecuted with incessant suffering. Nor am I driven by fear,—I whose courage did not fail after threefold and fourfold torments. But moved only by the love of Truth, I offer to all men the certainty, not of ignorance nor conventional pretence, but of religious power and fact. For this power and fact I rest partly on the perceptions of my own experience, partly on careful research into the experience of others, partly on that finer sense by which humanity is beginning to scent out the things that transfigure it to a height of glory not to be reached by logic.”<sup>3</sup>

With such records before them, how can nominal followers of him whom they call incarnate truth now tolerate the reservations and shifts and devices by which the pretence of orthodoxy is maintained? How many

<sup>1</sup> This is certainly suggested by passages in his treatise called *Atheism Overthrown*, where he denounces those who “make the part of more worth than the whole,” and compares such arrogance to that of “a parasitic worm ensconced in the entrails of a man, and counting the man as nothing compared with itself.”

<sup>2</sup> A disciple, Adam of Saxony, managed to smuggle them out of the prison, and they were published in Germany.

<sup>3</sup> For the translation, such as it is, I am responsible ; and as said before, I am venturing to quote myself in an obscure little book with the *nom-de-plume* of “H. C. Ewart,” and long out of print.

preachers really believe the supernatural story of Man from Adam to Christ, although they declare it to be one consistent whole? How many trained or scholarly teachers of youth themselves believe what they tell their pupils about Noah, and Abraham, and Jacob, and Moses and Joshua, and Samuel and David? How many really hold to the Virgin Birth of Jesus while they solemnly recount it? How many find it possible to picture to themselves as actual the revival of the corpse of Jesus in the tomb, the rolling away of the stone by angelic might, the passage of the same physical body of "bones and flesh" through a solid door, the consumption of "broiled fish and honeycomb," and then the flight into heaven? Granting that such things are vaguely believed—not realised—by the unthinking multitude to whom it is the duty of these preachers and teachers to minister truth, how can it be consistent with loyalty to God to speak and act in the most sacred relations on assumptions which at best they regard as only half true, and even that in some non-natural sense? "Economies" of truth in the pulpit, an acted part at the altar, insincerity at the teacher's desk, drag down the moral standard of our national life. And yet, conscious as we are of the pretences pervading ecclesiastical or sectarian professions of belief, we affect amazement at the subordination of honesty to greed of gold in the secular world! Surely the two phenomena seem closely related the one to the other, if not directly, as cause and effect, at least indirectly as aptitude and opportunity. For the conscience relaxed by unreality in professed religion is ready for any chance to play the knave elsewhere.

Let it not be said that in these words I admit the total failure of the New Testament and of the early Church to

establish amongst men an awe for the sacredness of truth. Not so. But I have admitted that the Pauline school weakened their stern teaching on the duty of truth at all costs in word and deed by their disastrous error in occasionally confounding faith with mere opinion or belief of fact. And I have endeavoured conscientiously to trace some of the fatal results of this mistake. Yet this is quite consistent with the contention that loyalty of soul to the highest truth known was, not indeed, exclusively, but specially characteristic of primitive Christianity, and has been from time to time recurrent in the pioneers of science and of religious reform. It is a comfort and a joy to know that in the last years of the nineteenth century, and the beginning of the twentieth century, the demand for the sacrifice of dead creeds to living truth has been no longer as the "voice of one crying in the wilderness." But whether through a "Rationalist Press Association," or through a "New Theology," or through the popularisation of the results of scholarly examination of musty manuscripts or buried records, it has now reached a power and a volume which neither Church nor school can any longer disregard.

## CHAPTER IX

### THE BIBLE AND SOCIAL EVOLUTION

THE factors in social evolution which interest us most are, perhaps, culture and freedom. And by culture I do not mean mere scholarship, but that condition of acquired knowledge, skill, perceptions, and habits which, in any community, measures its distance from the lowest known condition of human beings. Freedom surely carries its own interpretation with it. For though it is paradoxical in this respect, that its perfection implies limitation—since no one is free who only does what the caprice or passion of the moment suggests—yet the paradox involves no practical difficulty. For we all know that while a life of mere selfishness is the worst of all slaveries, yet, on the other hand, the constraints necessary to an ordered society are so adopted by each loyal member of it that, while doing what others wish, he does also what he himself desires.

If, in the above definition of culture, I have not mentioned law or art, it is because the former, being essentially custom,<sup>1</sup> is the offspring of culture and freedom,

<sup>1</sup> νόμος; and even in the case of the decrees of a despot or Acts of Parliament, if there is not custom at the back of them—or, say, public opinion or prejudice—they do not usually survive.



in the union of which prepotency belongs now to the one and now to the other.<sup>1</sup> Nor is it necessary or even possible to separate art from culture and freedom, of which it is alternately an inspiration and a product. Thus, for instance, the songs of Tyrtæus were an inspiration of freedom, while the Attic drama was its product. Its product, I say, because the wide range of thought and criticism of things both divine and human would have been impossible on any other stage than that of a free commonwealth. Of the relation of the Bible to religion and morals I have already treated. And it is matter for regret that many so-called "freethinkers" are disposed to excommunicate all who cannot ignore religion as a fundamental factor in the forces of social evolution from prehistoric animism to the coming Pantheism.

Literature, as the term is commonly used, includes a great deal that is certainly not art, and much that is discordant with morals. But the whole of it belongs to culture in so far as it marks the distance its writers and readers have travelled from the lowest condition of human beings. Further, to culture belongs the instinct of self-government, the elevation of taste, the evolution of the social idea from its dead level of homogeneity amongst savages to the complex co-ordination of individual characters, powers, and functions in the modern free State. Thus the value of any sacred book, whether in the Eastern

<sup>1</sup> *E.g.* in the laws which sanctioned the burning alive of a wife for what was called "petty treason," the prepotency belonged to custom, whereas in the laws which bind the husband to sustain the wife, but not the wife, however rich, to sustain the husband; which make the husband responsible for the debts of the wife, but not the wife for the debts of the husband; which—in recent times—allow a wife to leave her husband with impunity but allow no such privilege to the man,—and several other laws making women a privileged class, we recognise the prepotency of moral and intellectual culture over custom.

or Western world, would most surely be determined, at least in part, by its influence on all these phases of culture. And if it should be said, as indeed it has been said both by pundits in the East and Church dignitaries in the West, that the supreme contemplation of God, or the salvation of the soul, is more precious than any or all forms of "secular" culture, this is a question to be decided by "the common sense of most"; and it is being decided now.

Whether, before the invention of printing, the filtration of Bible literature through the Church gave more culture to the illiterate multitude of Christians than the occasional echoes of Homer and other popular poets had given to the untaught multitude in heathen times, is a question on which opinions may differ. But, at any rate, considering the fact that Pauline Christianity was part of the spiritual and social evolution by which a new age was introduced, it seems more than probable that this indirect communication of the Bible to the people imparted a limited culture specially adapted to the needs of Europe and Western Asia in a crisis of the pilgrimage of man. But, on the other hand, the danger of bibliolatry is only too apparent in the contemptuous references often made by Christian authorities to the uselessness of pagan literature since access to the Bible had been secured by the Church. Canon LX. of the Apostolical Council, as edited by Bail, reads thus:—"If to the injury of laity and clergy, any one promulgates in the Church as Holy Scripture any forged books of impious men, let him be deposed."<sup>1</sup> But a note is added by the editor which suggests that those ancient councils, or the Church

<sup>1</sup> It appears to be assumed that this was exclusively a clerical crime, since "deponatur"—the sentence assigned—could not apply to laymen.

opinion which their unauthentic records represent, were anxious not only for the purity of Scripture, but also for the exclusion of all other literature. For there a curious and impossible decree is attributed to the apostles, the only value of which is that it shows the tendencies of Christian opinion at the time of the forgery, perhaps late in the third or early in the fourth century. The decree runs as follows :—

“Abstain from all books of the Gentiles. For what hast thou to do with alien books or laws or false prophecies, which indeed often divert light-minded men from the faith? Or what dost thou find lacking in the law of God, that thou shouldst betake thyself to those fables of the Gentiles? For if thou desirest to traverse matters of history, thou hast the (Books of) Kings; if philosophy<sup>1</sup> and poetry, thou hast the Prophets, and Job, and the author of Proverbs, in which thou wilt find clearly displayed the very essence of poetry and wisdom, since they are the utterances of the Lord God, who alone is wise. Again, if thou desirest lyrics, thou hast also the Psalms; while if thou wishest to look into the origin of things, thou hast Genesis. If thou desirest law and regulations, thou hast the glorious law of God. Therefore withhold thyself strenuously from all alien literature and books of the Devil.”<sup>2</sup>

If the last words of this quotation look startling, two considerations may help to mitigate the apparent incongruity. For, firstly, the real author of the words was probably very illiterate, and knew but little of the

<sup>1</sup> The word used is “sophistica,” but obviously the classical sense was not in the writer’s mind, as the following context shows.

<sup>2</sup> “Ab omnibus igitur externis et diabolicis libris vehementer te contine.”

literature he assigned to the Devil. And secondly, in those times, as well as amongst the Jews of the time of Christ, the Devil was believed to be capable of appearing as an angel of light. If he might himself heal demoniacs in order to discredit miracles wrought by holier powers, he might certainly also inspire the production of works of art with the sinister design of prejudicing appreciative minds against the more sober attractions of the Old Testament and the New. And, indeed, though Manichæism was always thought to be so very deadly a heresy, yet the early Church, as well as some later and even modern Puritans, were more Manichæan than they knew. For if the essential error of that heresy consisted in the dualism derived originally from Zoroaster, what could be more akin to it than the saying, "We know that we are of God, and the whole world lieth in the evil one"?<sup>2</sup> Whatever, therefore, was not of "us" must needs be of the Devil. And the older amongst us, who have happily lived to breathe the freer air of the new reformation, can well remember how, in the earlier half of the last century, a precisely similar Manichæism was accounted true religion. The theatre, dancing, and many harmless sports, however purely they might be conducted, were regarded as "lying in the Evil One." Nay, the doctrine was constantly maintained that the good deeds of an unregenerate man were of the nature of sin.

This perverse habit of mind was only a logical application of that divorce between things sacred and secular which was not indeed of Christ, but was one of the first corruptions of the early Church, and which was confirmed and enforced by an unnatural treatment of the Bible. I

<sup>1</sup> 2 Cor. xi. 14.

<sup>2</sup> 1 John v. 19, Revised Version.



say unnatural treatment, rather than supernatural awe. For, making due allowance for the necessary ignorance of even the most learned Fathers of the Church concerning the vastness of the universe and the antiquity of Man, what could be more contrary to healthy reason and common sense than this undistinguishing devotion, not only to the exceptional spiritual aspirations, but to the mere folklore of an obscure and exclusive tribe? What blinding of the judgment, what wilful perversion of obvious facts must have been needed before well-informed Christians could be brought to regard as diviner than Greek poetry and philosophy such barbarisms as the Hebrew myths of the Deluge, or the horrors of Lot's story, or the records of Jacob's cowardly dishonesty, or of Joshua's appalling massacres? And yet, even after the Gospels and Epistles had established themselves as "holy writ," these sickening traditions of a once savage tribe were regarded as the "word of God" no less than the very "Beatitudes" themselves. If ever the term "bibliolatry" can be fairly used, it certainly can be applied with justice to a state of mind which, treating a tribal literature as one book, forces on it an unreal unity as well as a uniform authority, and finds the Spirit of God as manifest in the Song of Deborah as in the Sermon on the Mount. It was this habit of mind which prompted the forgery of the alleged apostolic decree quoted above; and, in forms more or less disguised, that habit of mind survived till the century in which we were born.

The effects of such superstition on culture were disastrous and cruel. For not only do we owe to it the neglect which allowed many a noble work of heathen poets and philosophers to perish, but it belittled and perverted the mind of the Church. Augustine, being in

early manhood a teacher of rhetoric, was deterred many years from reading the Bible because of what he considered the poverty of its literary merits as compared with the classics<sup>1</sup> that he loved. But after his conversion he gradually approximated to the state of mind described above. And though he was too much of a scholar totally to condemn the literature of the pagans, yet his discourses and writings always seem to imply that for the Christian the Bible is literature enough. Now, the Greek and Roman literature embodied the whole life of two great groups of races. And though these groups of races were very inferior in numbers to the dimly known hordes of the North, and the still less known swarms of the Far East, yet, considering only their practical influence in the then known world, we may say that their literature embodied the life of the predominant half of mankind. On the other hand, the Bible presented only the development of a tribal religion up to the time when it unfolded the outlines of a world-wide organisation. From this point of view its importance is great ; and it is most unfortunate that many rationalists of a certain school see in it only a succession of frauds. But it is to be feared that the Christians did not realise the true interest of the Bible, and chiefly valued it as confirming the commission of the Church. Under such circumstances, it was inevitable that the influence of the Bible should be for a time inimical to culture, as we have defined the latter. For there was in the honour done to it a touch of fetishism, which, so far as it worked effectively, tended to lessen rather than widen the distance between the state of the Christian world and the

<sup>1</sup> *Confessions*, iii. 5. His reference, however, appears to be confined to the New Testament.

lowest known condition of human beings. But this deleterious influence was limited by certain compensatory tendencies, which we shall presently note.

Meantime, it must be conceded that this superstitious and exclusive cult of the Bible did not a little to prepare the advent of the "dark ages." Not that this was the only cause of that eclipse. For, as we have allowed that Christianity was only one factor among many in the social evolution which very slowly differentiated post-Christian from pre-Christian times, so we must equally allow that the exclusive cult of the Bible by the Church was only one among many causes which brought about the decay of literature. Still, it was probably one of the most effective amongst those causes. For when the best minds were wholly occupied in the elaboration of metaphysical or theological theories, based, not on any realities, but only on obscure texts of doubtful authorship, the sunny fields of natural imagination and unshackled thought were inevitably deserted. It is true, indeed, that Augustine's *Confessions* have a kind of thrilling interest, though that is mostly of a morbid nature; and that his *City of God* is a noble work, though marred by forced, unnatural, and false explanations of the fact that the favourites of God suffered equally with the favourites of the Devil from the woes of the time. It is true, likewise, that the golden-mouthed preacher of Constantinople left models of pulpit eloquence which, for simple directness of utterance, variety of illustration, power of appeal, and attractive charm have perhaps never been surpassed.

But these men were exceptional. The "Apostolic Fathers"—if we except the singular Epistle to Diognetus—are now so musty that no one would endure their dulness were it not for their suggestiveness as to early

Christian modes of thought. The interest of Justin Martyr's celebrated dialogue with Trypho lies mainly in a comparison of his quotations from the "Memoranda of the Apostles" with the texts of our Gospels. Irenæus, in quoting with apparent confidence the sayings of the elders, descends to depths of absurdity where all faith in his judgment is lost ; and we cease to wonder that such a man should confuse his old teacher, Polycarp's, reminiscences of some John of Ephesus with supposed recollections of John the son of Zebedee. Origen was in some respects of a wider though not of a deeper mind than Augustine ; but it would surely be absurd to compare the human interest of his works with that of the great classics, or even of later pagan writers, such as Lucian.

It is, of course, true that both the greater and lesser heathen authors lightly assumed as a matter of course—though in what sense we are never quite sure—the prevalent mythology of their compatriots. But they were not obsessed by it as the Christian writers were by the theological traditions of their Church. In fact, they did not take it seriously ; and whenever they touched upon the deeper problems of life they had recourse to some as yet ill-defined elements of a religion of the universe, which elements might indeed be described as latent in the mythology, but by which, just as far as they were evolved and applied, the mythology must needs be superseded and effaced.<sup>1</sup> Very different was the position of Christian writers. For they did not hold their mythology lightly ; or rather, they did not consider it as mythology

<sup>1</sup> For illustrations take the *Agamemnon* of Æschylus and the *Antigone* of Sophocles, especially in the latter the speech of Antigone defying the threats of Kreon.



at all. And though they too had glimpses of a religion of the universe, the notion that it could supersede their mythology was "anathema." They hastened to cramp and confine it within the verbal symbols of their sacred text. But such an arbitrary process evaporated human interest from most of their works. The depressing effect on literature of such examples, backed by the authority of the Church, must surely have been immense.

If we turn to physical science, the influence of bibliolatriy in discouraging its progress can scarcely be denied, but the mode and extent of that influence may easily be misstated. It is a historical fact that from the unauthorised and regretted murder of Archimedes by Roman soldiery during the sack of Syracuse in the second century B.C., to Roger Bacon's pathetic career in the thirteenth century of our era, science appeared to be entirely paralysed, and only survived in the half-animated forms of astrology and alchemy. But the above dates are quite sufficient to bar an exclusive assignment of the blame for this stagnation to any influence, direct or indirect, of the Bible. For many adverse causes were at work, amongst which the curious agnosticism to which Socrates surrendered himself in early life, when he became convinced of the unknowableness of physical causes and processes, may perhaps be taken as illustrative and even typical. The narrow limitation of the senses, and the lack of instruments to extend their range, offered insuperable impediments to the extension of physical knowledge. Even the enormous industry and research of Aristotle could not overcome this difficulty, and though he wrote a great deal about physical science, it was not this part of his writings which laid hold on the minds of men. If

ecclesiastical scholars for a thousand years prized his philosophy above Plato's, this was not so much on account of his discourses about Nature, but because of his metaphysics, which more easily lent themselves to the illustration of prosaic creeds than did the speculations of Plato.

It is true, indeed, that Epicurus revived the atomic speculations of Democritus, and that Lucretius improved upon Epicurus, and especially improved upon him in paradoxical fashion by unconsciously making his master's philosophy moral, spiritual, and inspiring rather than materialistic.<sup>1</sup> But such rational interest in the mystery of matter was exceptional, and during the arrest of legitimate physical research curiosity about Nature was almost confined to the forms of magic, witchcraft, astrology, and alchemy. Of these the two former were, of course, merely barbarous, or rather savage; and we may sympathise with their moral condemnation both by wise pagan rulers and also by the Church, though the cruelty with which the latter encouraged Christian magistrates to repress them was a deep disgrace. Astrology and alchemy were treated with greater forbearance, not because the Church saw in them a preparation for true science, but, so long as the stars were not worshipped, it seemed not irreverent to read in their movements the will of their creator; while, as to alchemy, if it refrained from magic, it was at least harmless, and might bring gain.

<sup>1</sup> I am well aware that Epicurus taught a pure morality and indeed practised it; but Lucretius breathed into it a sacred fire, which is first perceived in his fervid invocation of Venus, considered by some of his admirers—but not by me—to be inconsistent with his *Weltanschauung*. See the openings of the second and third books. The *sæva indignatio* which pervades the *Iphigeneia* passage is also an illustration of what I mean.

But the fatal check imposed—not by the Bible, but by its misuse—on the progress of science was the doctrine of salvation by belief. True, the Pauline teaching apparently was that this saving belief included only a firm persuasion that God had raised Jesus from the dead. And this teaching was, as we have seen, consistent with much liberality of thought on the higher moral and social interests of man, and with a frank determination to seek “whatsoever things are true.” But in the two centuries following the death of the apostle, this belief came to be articulated with a rigid system of theology so compacted that, if the smallest fraction were denied, the rest perished like what are called Rupert’s drops when a single point has been removed. In this system the resurrection of Christ was glorious not merely as manifesting “the power of an endless life,” not merely as a miracle—for miracles were more common than star showers in those days, and excited less awe—but because it was the consummation of a divinely ordained course of events beginning with the expulsion of fallen man from Eden, and continued by judgments, signs, wonders, and “types” through the patriarchial and Israelitish history, the Mosaic law and temple ritual up to the supreme events of Golgotha and Olivet. Now, when this system, often in modern days called “the plan of salvation,” had been elaborated, it was no longer enough to believe that God had raised Jesus from the dead. No; whosoever would be saved must also believe that every syllable of the miscellaneous literature compacted into this false view of the world’s history was the very word of God. It is no doubt possible to quote doubtful or timid utterances of liberal-minded churchmen of old which might seem to permit more freedom of thought. But the

average, the regulative, the controlling mind of the Church was as stated, and this was an absolutely fatal bar to any progress in science.

Thus, although the stagnation of inquiry had set in before the Jewish and Christian Scriptures attained any great influence over the secular world, it is impossible to deny that bibliolatry, as it gathered force, extended that stagnation and prolonged it. Indeed, during many ages there was hardly an effort to break the bonds thus imposed on freedom of thought. For the mutually contradictory accounts given in Gen. i. and ii. were regarded as God's own statement about the origin of earth, animals, and men, while the poetic language of sacred lyrics, and the audacious command of Joshua to the sun to stand still, made it an article of faith that the earth was the centre of the little universe made in six days, and that around the earth all planets and stars moved along lines ruled on cyclic and epicyclic spheres. Under such a cramping system of religious faith, when once the Church had gained direction of the secular arm, the fate of any impious wretch who pretended that the earth moved, while God had declared that it stood still, was assured as soon as the accusation was made. Copernicus, as we have seen, was only saved by his peaceful death immediately after the publication of his book.

Nor were the mischievous effects of this unworthy and irreverent superstition wholly cancelled by the Toleration Act or by the succeeding struggle for sectarian equality. For all sects alike, so far as they had the power, refused equality to those who repudiated the Bible cult. And many survivors from the former half of the nineteenth century still recall with shame the humiliating apologies



then made for geology in the endeavour to reconcile its revelations with Hebrew folklore. The most opprobrious of epithets — “infidel” — that is, unfaithful, traitorous—was applied to those who could not force their consciences into a pretence of belief in what to them was incredible. Honesty in such matters was regarded as wickedness. Doubt of stories compiled, no one knows exactly when, or by whom, was treated as a dishonour done to God. And the laws of the land, with the approval of the so-called “free churches,”<sup>1</sup> punished as blasphemy any outspoken denial of the historicity and accuracy of the Bible. Those laws still, to our shame, remain on the Statute Book ; and belief in the supernatural character of the Bible in some form or other—perhaps the belief of Henry VIII. in his later days—has often been pronounced by our judges to be protected by our common law. But recent trials have shown public opinion to be increasingly impatient of prosecutions for blasphemy when the offence is at worst a breach of good taste or an ill-mannered disregard of public feeling. Perhaps, however, the most conspicuous and mischievous survival at the present day of the old superstition of salvation by belief is seen in the interminable and disgraceful wrangle over public elementary education. Nothing can explain this but wilful blindness to the fact that the days of “simple Bible” are gone for ever, and that the only way of peace is to teach morality in the people’s school, while leaving salvation by belief to the Church. It must be confessed, then, that as regards the liberation of inquiry, the progress of science and the popular education necessary to the frank acceptance of

<sup>1</sup> They are becoming more really free now, thanks, mainly, to the “New Theology” movement.

newly discovered fact, the influence of the Bible has not been favourable, but the reverse.

On the other hand, that minority of the human race which has come under the influence of the Bible forms no exception to the rule that "peoples of the Book"—that is, races with a literature consecrated as divine—have always been stimulated to such studies as would throw light on the doctrines and significance and authority of the Book. The fanatical devotion of the later Hebrews to their sacred volume is well known. They counted its words, its very letters, and pointed out the word that had the honour of occupying precisely the centre of the collected books. Having originally a rude alphabet consisting of consonants only, with which the proper vowels were traditionally associated by use and wont, the Jews, after the destruction of their temple and city, found it necessary to elaborate a system of vowel points to preserve what they regarded as the true pronunciation ; and nothing but devotional zeal can account for the minuteness with which they invented visual representations of every slightest shade of difference in sound. Nor were they content with this ; but added a complex system of accents, indicating to the reader every rise and fall of tone, every pause, and, so far as possible, every modulation of the voice. The later Greeks had indeed their accents, about the practical significance of which in reading there is even yet much dispute among scholars. But it is at any rate certain that the New Testament, even after the establishment of Christianity by law, never received the same kind of devotion to its syllables and letters as did the Old Testament among the Jews of the Dispersion. For if it had, we might have known more than we do now about the relation of Hellenistic to

modern Greek.<sup>1</sup> Still, among Christians, as well as amongst Vedantists, Zoroastrians, Buddhists, and Mahomedans, the possession of a sacred book inevitably engendered a certain literary ardour which showed itself in various forms.

Both Gibbon and Milman,<sup>2</sup> from very different stand-points, have traced the inevitable evolution of monasteries into schools of copyists, theologians, critics, metaphysicians, and philosophers. Of this I need say nothing except that the labours of the Benedictines, who were devoted to biblical and patristic lore long before the issue of their well-known massive folios, certainly kept alive scholarship in the dark ages. Perhaps the survival of Latin as the ecclesiastical language, and also the cultivation of New Testament and patristic Greek, had some share in preserving the aptitude which found its opportunity after the fall of Constantinople, and the precarious dispersion of Greek literature through the Western world. All this must be set to the credit of the Bible and of the veneration it excited in the minds of the more cultured men of those days. But then came the inevitable difficulty created by the superstition of salvation by belief. For the Renaissance demanded scope for freedom of thought; and Bible fetishism refused it. Hence the martyrology of science. Thus the Bible did help culture by necessitating the study of letters even in the darkest age. But only prejudice can deny that the misinterpretation of its claims had done much to deepen the darkness. And there is much reason

<sup>1</sup> Of course Greek is redundant in vowels. But if there had been the same awe for the very sounds which the Jews cherished in reading their sacred volume, one fancies that Christians might have taken more pains to preserve the pronunciation.

<sup>2</sup> See Gibbon's *Decline and Fall*, chap. xxxiv., and Milman's *Latin Christianity*, Book viii., chap. v.

to think that the traditions of Greece and Rome, which influenced even the barbarian conquerors, would more quickly have emancipated thought had they not been hampered and checked by that strange perversion of the real nature of the Judæo-Christian book.

Although, for reasons above given, I have not thought it necessary to treat at any length of the effect of the Bible upon law, yet a word or two must be said in passing from culture to freedom as factors in social evolution, because, as already said, law is the offspring of both.<sup>1</sup> It is not essential to be learned in the law of order to judge of its general relation to the evolution in morals. And in the direct or indirect influence of a misunderstood Bible on Christian law, certain facts stand out too plainly to be denied. Nothing that will here be said is in the slightest degree inconsistent with observations already made on brotherly love as in a special sense the social bond of the earliest Christian Church ; and, in one form or another, this brotherly love or "charity" in St Paul's sense has from time to time inspired obscure societies of monks, nuns, "Friends of God," mystics, and various sectaries who have tried to return to the teaching of Christ. Hence, judging the past by their own consciousness, it was not unnatural that members of these brotherhoods, many of them knowing little or nothing of Church history, should assume that, excepting the misdeeds of a few misguided Christian emperors, popes, and prelates, the story of Christianity had been that of a moral revolution, in which "judgment, mercy, and faith," by displacing the barbarities of heathen superstition, had assumed the prime and sovereign place which Jesus assigned them. But the reality as presented to us by all

<sup>1</sup> Cf. p. 268, *ante*.



our great and most trustworthy historians affords a sad contrast.

In the first place, the law of Moses was adopted as enacted by the eternal, and the distinction between its temporary authority, as in matters of ritual, and its permanent force as a moral code, was never consistently made or firmly held. For instance, the cruel words, "Thou shalt not suffer a witch to live," had far more power over the public conscience in the Middle Ages, and even later, than the words of Jesus said to have been addressed to a woman surprised in a worse offence: "Neither do I condemn thee; go, and sin no more." The savage laws against heresy in the comparatively late Book of Deuteronomy (chap. xiii.),<sup>1</sup> furnished fearful precedents to the persecuting spirit of the orthodox so soon as the Church was able to direct legislation about religion. But this has been inevitably, though incidentally, illustrated in the preceding pages, and need not be further laboured here.

Of more importance perhaps is it to note that, according to the best authorities,<sup>2</sup> so far from softening the rigours

<sup>1</sup> In these days it is impossible to take for granted familiarity with the Bible even on the part of those who most passionately advocate it as a school book. So, in case readers have not a Bible at hand, I will quote the passage referring to any *city* convicted of heresy (*alias* idolatry): "Thou shalt surely smite the inhabitants of that city with the edge of the sword, destroying it utterly, and all that is therein, and the cattle thereof, with the edge of the sword." We may be sure that if the cattle were not to be spared, neither were the women and children. It is, of course, to be remembered that the legislation of Deuteronomy was fictitious, in the sense that it was represented as given some eight hundred years before it was written. But though by the decaying kingdom of Judæa it was never carried out, that did not lessen its evil influence on Christians, who took it as the very law of God.

<sup>2</sup> See Milman's *Latin Christianity*, Maine, Lecky. Nor do I think Gibbon ought to be excluded on account of slight occasional lapses into partiality. In general he is most judicial.

of Roman law, Christian legislation, based rather on Moses than on the Gospel, enfeebled it in some respects and barbarised it in others. If Constantine abolished crucifixion, it was from no humane tenderness, for he favoured rather burning alive. The Roman rigour which buried alive unchaste vestal virgins was hateful enough ; but the Christian law which substituted the stake and fire for many forms of unchastity can hardly be considered an advance. Jews had to suffer for ages an exaggerated form of the injustice attributed by them to their own God, who was said in various passages of their law to visit the sins of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation. But in Christian morals, as interpreted by popes and mobs, the twentieth generation was not immune from the Furies who avenged the murder of Christ. The treatment of witches, Jews, and heretics, according to the supposed teachings of the Bible, is a sufficient illustration of the degradation of the Scriptures by the prime falsehood of salvation by belief.

When we turn to the influence of the Bible on freedom as a growing factor in social evolution, we are met by the difficulty that the races who earliest developed constitutional government had their political instincts quite independently of the Bible, though when they became familiar with it they could quote it effectively for their purpose ; while, on the other hand, the races who longest maintained despotism were those to whom the Bible had first been given. Moreover, the partial quotations of rebels about the dignity of human nature, and the duty of choosing freedom when possible, were easily parried by multifarious texts about the sacredness of "the Lord's anointed" and the divine ordination of "the powers that be." If we take the only case in all history in which the Bible has

been an effective, and, for a few brief years, a resistless weapon in the hands of rebellion against unreason in high places—I mean, of course, the too brief triumph of the British Commonwealth under Oliver Cromwell—we find that it was not any biblical doctrine about the rights of man, but about belief and worship that fired the souls and strengthened the arms of the victors. For though ship-money and other illegal exactions supplied the fuel, zeal against “Popery” struck the spark that kindled the flame of revolt. The first Parliament in which Cromwell sat was largely occupied with religious questions, and his heat in speaking of these amazed some of his colleagues.

Now, when we speak of “religious questions” in the early Parliaments of Charles I., we must remember that for the rising party they were Bible questions. Lollardism had never completely died out, though it was held in abeyance under the brutal rule of the Tudors. But there were signs of its revival under Elizabeth; and under James it rapidly assumed the new form called “Puritanism.” In fact, the rate of its revival was fairly proportionate to the spread of Bible-reading in Wycliffe’s version, and its successors. And the “most dread sovereign” who has the credit of giving us the Authorised Version, would have been better advised, so far as dynastic interests were concerned, if he had persisted in his first indifference and refused to countenance the new version at all. For though, as I have said, the Bible with its many facets could be appealed to in support of almost any theory of government, yet when once a solid phalanx of stern believers in “the plan of salvation” was established in the heart of the kingdom, that Bible interpretation became supreme which saw nothing in the Book but the eternal worth of the indi-

vidual soul, and the scheme devised by the Almighty for its redemption. All other aspects of the Scriptures were overlooked or were forced into harmony with this. And salvation being of such tremendous import, any State institutions or ecclesiastical traditions and customs that were thought to obscure this pure gospel became intolerable and must be discarded at any cost.

Now, when those actuated by this zeal for the Bible found that not only the solid phalanx of Puritans, but the whole people were outraged by financial grievances, and by extensions of the royal prerogative, as illegal as they were intolerable, it was natural enough that religious and secular motives should be fused. Whether in a matter purely religious the devouter English Puritans would, like the Scotch Covenanters, have resisted unto blood with weapons in their hands, is perhaps uncertain. But when the overthrow of ancient laws and royal contempt for Parliament made civil war inevitable, the scenes of carnage ensuing did not in the least lessen the confidence of the Cromwellians that they were fighting the battles of the Lord. Apart from this source of burning zeal, it may be doubted whether the king, his courtiers, and their dependents—trained in habits of superstitious loyalty—could have been overcome. But when Oliver went down from the ineffectual fight at Edgehill, and began to drill Bible readers and expounders as the nucleus of the future new model army, victory was made certain. Thus in the solitary instance, so far as I am aware, in which the Bible was an effective auxiliary to people “rightly struggling to be free,” it was so incidentally—one might almost say accidentally—for ship-money, forced loans, and the royal power to dispense with the law upon occasion, were not opposed to revelation. But the worth



of the soul and the right of access to God without the intervention of sacrament or priest were open to biblical proof, and the possession of the Puritan conscience by burning convictions on these matters incited a sacred *furor*, which otherwise might have been lacking to their political creed.

It may be plausibly said that I am wrong in calling the rise of the English Commonwealth the solitary instance in which the Bible was an effective auxiliary to rebellion against despotism. For, as above admitted, the Scotch Covenanters seem to afford another case, and their resistance was more purely religious. But the ultimate success of the Scotch Presbyterians was entirely an after-effect of the temporary success of the English Commonwealth. For William III. was shrewd enough to discern that the biblical zeal which executed Charles I. and drove away James II. derived in Scotland an additional intensity from a unity of creed unknown in England, and from a democratic Church organisation which had all the strength of a multitude with one mind. But, after all, the establishment of the Scottish Kirk was really a consequence of Cromwellian victories, and is hardly conceivable without them. It was part, therefore, of the general movement in Britain, to which, as I have said, the Bible was incidentally an effective help.

In other lands it seems vain to seek for such a case. The superstitious use of the Bible by the insurgent German peasants in Luther's time has already been described, and clearly offers no parallel. It might be supposed that the rise of the Dutch Republic owed much to biblical inspiration. But the long agony of that struggle, lasting for nigh a hundred years, began at a time when in the Low Countries the common people's

knowledge of the Bible must have been limited to the extracts given in Church services. And though Protestant opinions made rapid progress amongst them, the probability is that this progress owed more to inter-racial hatred, impatience of Spanish tyranny over a Low German race, and interference with the country's commercial prosperity, than to any general study of the Bible. At any rate, there was never in the Low Countries anything like the spectacle of Cromwell's soldiers, every one of whom was as ready with his Bible as his sword. In the case of the French Huguenots the Bible, though certainly not as well known as among the English Puritans, undoubtedly had an influence. But it was not effective because it did not enable the sectaries to lay hold on national opinion and turn it into another course. What the Bible did for England, the eighteenth-century philosophers and encyclopædists had to do for France; and they did not do it so well.

Nevertheless, there was one kind of freedom which was much more completely secured by the French Revolution than by the brief triumph of the English Commonwealth; I mean freedom of thought. Unfortunately, custom, aided by ecclesiastical bigotry, has contracted the phrase "free thought" into a single word to which a sinister meaning has been attached. For in this narrow and sectarian sense "freethought" means thought only in one direction, and no one is a "freethinker" who, at least in the realm of religion, fails to take as his model Goethe's Mephistopheles, the "Spirit who always denies." According to this nothing can be true about religion but negation, and any great thinkers like Kant, Schleiermacher, Hegel, who have dared to make positive assertions, were not free in thought. To such a conception of "free-

thought" even Spinoza was not a "freethinker"; for he was one of the most religious of men, and he cherished a faith in God so firm that no curses of the synagogue nor hostility or temptations of the world could shake it. Or, to refer to lesser names, according to this sectarian interpretation, neither Roger Bacon nor Thomas Campanella, the latter of whom endured days of frightful torture rather than yield his mental liberty, were "freethinkers," because they had a positive religious faith. Nay, in that very race which most completely shattered ecclesiastical or biblical fetters on thought, some of its noblest sons would be denied the title of "freethinkers" in the cant sense which since the beginning of the eighteenth century has been given to the word. For men such as Albert and Jean Reville, as well as Alfred Loisy, may be regarded as grandsons of the Revolution. They have all asserted in various degrees their inalienable right to think for themselves; but because they have declined to think only in one direction, they are supposed not to think freely. Now, surely freedom of thought is shown not by the conclusions reached, but by the mental methods used; and a man who in the exercise of his best judgment, without hope of reward or fear of penalty, leaves, let us say, Wesleyan Methodism for the Catholic Church, may have much more real freedom of thought during his transition than the bigot who condemns all religion as mere fraud. One of the worst results of this lamentable misuse of a noble word in a miserable sectarian sense is that it inevitably, though most unjustly, has suggested during two centuries the etymological analogy of "free-liver."<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> The first quotation of this misuse which the *New English Dictionary* has been able to find is dated conjecturally 1692. In 1708 Dean Swift wrote of "atheists, libertines, despisers of religion, that is to say, all those

But be that as it may, it remains true that the French Revolution did much more effectually and completely than the English achievement of constitutional government, put an end to the bondage of superstition, whether imposed by Bible or Church. Now, this difference between the results of the two revolutions was undoubtedly caused by the difference of position held by the Bible in the England of Cromwell and the France of Robespierre. For the Cromwellians staked all their political as well as their religious hopes on the Bible as the Word of God. But the French, in whose nominal religion the Bible held a secondary place, had no temptation to accept an infallible book instead of an infallible Church; and when they shook off the yoke of the latter, the authority of the former evaporated as a matter of course. Neither the Napoleonic Concordat, nor the temporary restoration of royalty, nor the Second Empire affects the main facts, for what we see in France now is indisputably the delayed result of the great Revolution in the triumph of free thought. With the question whether this is likely to be a permanent advantage for the French people or not, I am not here concerned, for I am dealing only with actual facts in the story of the relations of the Bible and Man. But adherents of the Puritan or ecclesiastical tradition, who are displeased with many things in the manners of contemporary France, would do well to remember that the people amongst whom equality and fraternity are more real than amongst any other people in the world, are no less displeased with who usually pass under the name of Free-thinkers." What the brilliant Dean's ideas of religion may have been, except as a bulwark of established order and a mode of securing a living, it is not easy to make out, but few more deadly thrusts have been aimed at religion than this sanction of the vulgar association of free thought about it with libertinism.



many things in the manners of contemporary Britain.<sup>1</sup> I do not pretend to be a judge, but at least I may urge that differences of race, climate, surroundings, and social traditions necessarily affect the degree of moral importance attached to modes of amusement, and administration of law, and forms of dissipation in different lands.<sup>2</sup>

If I should be asked whether I regret this biblical influence on English politics, I should reply that on the whole I do not. For it has certainly served to strengthen that conservative instinct which, when not mere stupid immobility, makes all the difference between continuous progress and discontinuous shocks of revolution. But I cannot blind myself to the proofs that this conservative instinct has been excessive in the English race, and responsible for the continuance of many belated abuses. Nor can it be denied that the substitution of an infallible book for an infallible Church has been an important, though not the only cause of the excess of the conserva-

<sup>1</sup> The annoyance of our French neighbours at finding the *Anglo-French* Exhibition closed against them on the one day in the week most convenient to them, and professedly closed on account of a Mosaic ritual command which no Englishman observes literally, and all interpret as suits their convenience, is well calculated to deepen the French conviction of English hypocrisy.

<sup>2</sup> I use the word in the Horatian sense of "dulce est desipere in loco." Intimate friends of my own, brought up in the strictest Evangelical sect, and strict Sabbatarians to this day, when travelling in France have unscrupulously attended on the Sunday the modified form of bull-fight permitted in that country. Nor is their case at all uncommon. English Pharisees readily become French Sadducees for the nonce when it helps their holiday. I do not think I could bring myself to attend a bull-fight either on a Sunday or any other day. But though I regret such customs, which are disappearing, the practice of my Evangelical friends affords ample proof that the Bible has nothing to do with those customs one way or the other. The Book was a controlling power in England for three hundred years before bull-baiting ceased.

tive instinct among us. Much must be allowed for the survival of feudal traditions even among the classes most wronged thereby, as, for instance, tenant farmers. Of these feudal traditions the sacredness of land and property is, perhaps, only a special form, and there are many others as yet inextricably intertwined with our social system. But the unreasonable privileges of property in general, whether real or personal, are sustained by other prejudices to which the teaching of Jesus certainly lends no countenance, while nevertheless they may be amply sustained on scriptural grounds if the whole Bible be the Word of God.

Encomiasts of the story of Joseph in Genesis are fully justified so long as they confine themselves to the skill with which the narrative has been compiled and the literary interest ensuing. But when they attempt to make it a model of morals for children of the twentieth century, they strangely ignore the ungenerous, oppressive, and despotic policy by which Pharaoh's chief minister is said to have used the distress of the people as a means of extorting from them their lands and cattle for the benefit of the king, and of finally making them all his bond slaves. The non-historical character of the story does not affect this point, for the moral is equally bad in a fictitious tale. The ideal of statecraft would surely have been to enforce such thrift that, at the end of the seven years' famine, the freemen of the nation should not only have possessed their lives, but their unmortgaged property together with seed for the better time coming. This, however, was not the ideal of the compiler, nor apparently is it of those who commend his narrative as ideal morality. For the narrator thought that the dignity and wealth of Pharaoh was far more important than the

freedom of his subjects. And this is the lesson taught by his story to twentieth-century children. What wonder if past generations, nourished on such lore, conceived that subjects existed for kings, and not kings for their subjects?

The sacredness of the "neighbour's landmark"<sup>1</sup> was, no doubt, in early Israelitish times a protection to the poor. But in latter days it has been used with much sanctimony as a defence of the rich. For tribes amongst whom all land was communal except the sites of dwellings, it was not needed. Wherever private ownership was introduced it was much to the interest of the weak that boundary stones should have a special sanctity. But when, under modern systems, the land became practically monopolised by a minority, the appeal to biblical authority on the sacredness of boundaries has often succeeded in giving an utterly disproportionate and even fictitious importance to the rights of the owner of land. As to personal privilege, the Church Catechism has often been unjustly charged with discountenancing reasonable ambition to make the most of our opportunities. But, as previously noted, the catechumen is instructed to do his duty not "in that state of life unto which it *hath pleased* God to call him," but "in that state of life unto which it *shall please* God to call him"—a very different thing. Yet, for all that, the Anglican Church, like Oliver Cromwell, has always believed in the expediency of a distinction in classes. But while I do not remember that Cromwell quoted Scripture in favour of his cherished social ideal of a "nobleman, a gentleman, a yeoman," the Church has often appealed to Pauline conservatism—or should we say indifference?—in regard to

<sup>1</sup> Deut. xix. 14, xxvii. 17; Prov. xxii. 28, xxiii. 10.

political issues. At any rate the Pauline sanction of "the powers that be," the exhortation that every Christian man should abide in the same calling wherein he was called," and the warning that "the magistrate beareth not the sword in vain" were used in a settled Christian civilisation in a manner which would have very much astonished the originators of these sayings, who perforce adopted them as necessitated by a time of distress. And as the ultimate sanction of this New Testament depreciation of, or indifference to, political equality, the Church made much use of that superstitious and sanctimonious phrase "the Lord's anointed," which, in the Old Testament, is redolent of a combination between clan leadership and fetishism.

Well would it have been for the Commonwealth if these natural errors had exhausted the evil influences of a misuse of the Bible on social evolution. But it has not been so. For far worse than any consecration of institutional conservatism has been the cramping of individual thought by a fetishistic terror of thinking or saying anything against the divine authority of the Book. Of this fetishistic terror we have some thrilling descriptions in the late J. A. Froude's *Nemesis of Faith*, which, though a work of less imagination than his chief work of history, relates in the form of fiction a story of spiritual experience. Not that I for a moment doubt his repudiation of any autobiographical intention; but it was quite impossible for a man of his intense feeling to avoid transferring to the subject of his narrative—I will not say his *hero*, of the repugnance—mingled with horror at that repugnance—which he himself had felt towards the theory of the Bible as the Word of God. Granting this, what strikes us as strange, pathetic, and,



in these “New Theology” days almost inconceivable in the case of a man of high culture, is the abject fear which seizes on the subject of the story when he is face to face with honest doubt.

“When I go to church, the old church of my old child days, when I hear the old familiar bells, with their warm, sweet heart music, and the young and old troop by along the road in their best Sunday dresses, old well-known faces and young unknown ones which by and by will grow to be so like them ; when I hear the lessons, the old lessons, being read in the old way, and all the old associations come floating back upon me, telling me what I too once was, before I ever doubted things were what I was taught they were ; oh, they sound so sad, so bitterly sad ! The tears rise into my eyes ; the church seems full of voices, whispering to me ‘Infidel, Infidel, Apostate’ ; all these believing faces in their reverent attention glisten with reproaches, so calm they look, so dignified, so earnestly composed. I wish—I wish I had never been born ! ” <sup>1</sup>

What words of abysmal unbelief are these last—of cowardly despair, of traitorous rebellion against the only God clearly known, the Universe One and Eternal ! To say “I wish I had never been born,” is as much as to say “I wish the universe had been other than it is,” because without the “I” it must have been other. And that is like wishing that two and two made five, which many an impecunious debtor does, thinking that the change would work only to his advantage, and forgetting that his debts would be increased as well. When will men learn that the perfection of the universe is not to be looked for in its convenience to us, but in the exquisite balance and concinnity of the infinite Whole, so that no part can be

<sup>1</sup> *The Nemesis of Faith*, The Walter Scott Publishing Co. Ltd., 1904, pp. 26-27.

annihilated and none of its so-called "laws" abrogated, even for an instant, without injury to all? "Should it be according to thy mind?" Experience shows the constitution of the universe, or God, to be such as to afford as much satisfaction to all of what we call its sentient parts, as is consistent with the harmony of the Whole. To desire more than this is selfishness; and selfishness is sin. But everyone who whines and groans because he cannot honestly keep to his grandfather's notion of the "word of God" is just in this case. He wants the progress of the world to be other than it is doomed to be,<sup>1</sup>—and that, to suit his pleasure. If we could conceive of a dragon-fly larva endowed with intellect and sentiment, we might imagine it wishing it had never been hatched, when the probably painful process of shedding the old skin begins, and therewith a new life. But the universe, like wisdom, "is justified of its children" all the same.

Now, everyone may sympathise, rightly, with the sentimental regrets that have sometimes given a momentary twinge of pain even to a stout Luther when contrasting the sensuous and sometimes passionate ritual of an abandoned superstition with the thinly rational residuum of "reformed" religion left to him. But those sentimental regrets have hardly anything in common with the horror of great darkness and the craven fear of impossible sacrilege which are described in the passage above quoted from the *Nemesis of Faith*. Unfortunately, however, that passage is only too true a portrayal of the morbid or even insane terrors which,

<sup>1</sup> This is not to be confounded with fatalism. I have endeavoured to show the difference in *Pantheism: its Story and Significance*, pp. 73-74, and in *Spinoza: A Handbook to the Ethics*, pp. 194 and 255.

under the prevalence of bibliolatry, have seized on some of the best of men when they began to suspect themselves of scepticism about "the word of God." Even the fine poetry of *In Memoriam*, often regarded as the melodious charter of free thought to the pious, implies everywhere, except perhaps in a few pantheistic passages,<sup>1</sup> an irreducible minimum of submission to the Bible as God's word. The words—"he fought his doubts, he gathered strength"—and their context imply a virtuous conquest over doubt in the interest of what used to be called a "broad-church" faith. But though the fair controversialist who held that "doubt is devil-born" is sweetly silenced, the *duty* of overcoming doubt is distinctly implied. The tone is very different from and distinctly nobler than that of the *Nemesis of Faith*. Yet both works alike illustrate how, during the nineteenth century, any symptoms of doubt about the divine and infallible authority of the Bible were regarded with a horror not unlike what we feel towards the signs of smallpox or plague.

Now such a mood of the public mind could not but be fatal to any complete realisation of that freedom which is the British citizen's boast. And that realisation was hindered—and is still—both in politics and in social life and in education. In politics the tyranny of an Established Church was largely aided and abetted by fear

<sup>1</sup> Canto cxxix., "Thy voice is on the rolling air," etc., seems to me meaningless unless pantheistic. But the following and last canto certainly suggests a return to Anglican "pragmatism." And cxix. harps on the old theme of the materialism of science. Canto lv., though a noble, passionate outburst, implies that there is no distinction between immortality and eternal life; while the prelude, and the constant recurrence to Christmas legends as historic facts, are sufficient proof of the same orthodox reserve.

for the national fetish ; for the two most effective arguments for the continuance of that anachronism were that it was a defence against "infidelity" and a bulwark against Rome. In his work on *Liberty*, John Stuart Mill quoted an Under-Secretary of State whom I cannot identify—and it does not in the least matter—as telling his constituents in 1857 that they were not to abuse the "precious word toleration." "As he understood it, it meant complete liberty to all,—freedom of worship *among Christians who worshipped upon the same foundation*. It meant toleration of all sects and denominations of *Christians who believed in the same mediation*."<sup>1</sup> It is true that the subject of the foolish Under-Secretary's speech was our government of India. But well might Mill ask : "Who, after this imbecile display, can indulge the illusion that religious persecution has passed away never to return ?" Certainly no one. The rack and the stake are inconsistent with modern sensibility. But persecution is not dependent upon particular instruments of torture, and Mill himself cites almost contemporary cases in which refusal to own the Bible as the Word of God was the cause either of criminal penalties or of the denial of civil rights.<sup>2</sup> The ungenerous and cruel denial of self-government to Irishmen in Irish affairs has, in recent times, been much more owing to Protestant bibliolatry than to commercial jealousy or to enmity of race. And we actually boast as a triumph of Liberalism the establishment of a mutilated University of which Catholics may avail themselves without any gross insult to their faith, provided that they have no University chapel within the precincts, and nominally apply no test, even to theological

<sup>1</sup> *R.P.A.*, reprint, p. 30 (note). The italics are, I believe, Mill's own.

<sup>2</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. 28.



professors. The encouragement of hypocrisy by the last proviso is self-evident. And in the meantime a Bible-worshipping nation prides itself upon the biblical tone which pervades its old Universities, while the great Church from which they were taken over is denied an analogous privilege for its religion in Ireland, though some two-thirds of the people belong to its flock.

While, therefore, we may appreciate with thankfulness the stern fervour imparted to the men of the English Commonwealth by their sacred book, into which they read their own opinions, and then regarded the latter as sanctioned by the Word of God ; and while we own that even the inconsistent spiritual descendants of those Puritans, by again reading into the Bible their own ideas, have cherished a stiff and thin morality not without its use in the godless times of the Restoration and during the ethical conventionality or indifference of the eighteenth century,—yet it must be admitted that, making all allowance for conspicuous exceptions already noted, the popular worship of the Scriptures during the nineteenth century was not an impulse to the enlargement of freedom, but rather a hindrance and restraint.

## CHAPTER X

### EPILOGUE

ON a review of the whole subject the following are the main conclusions at which I arrive, and though, of course, I cannot count upon their being obvious to others, I may hope that they are worthy of consideration by all.

I. The phenomena of the Bible and the story of its relations to mankind are perfectly consistent with what we know of the processes of human evolution, but are not in the least suggestive of any miraculous revelation from a personal Being outside the world. Should I be honoured—contrary to expectation—by the attention of readers who instinctively recur to the theophanies of Eden and Sinai, to the divine judgment by deluge, to Jahweh's intercourse with Abraham, and finally to the Incarnation and Resurrection, I can only say, with all respect for those who still accept these myths and visions as facts, that in my view they establish the above conclusion, that we are dealing with human evolution and not with miraculous revelation from a personal Being indefinitely greater than man. But, in the first place, I may premise that every one of these incidents is a proper subject not of intuition, like the fact of our own existence, but of historical evidence ; and the evidence does not exist. It is undeni-

able that even the clergy and ministers whose duty it used to be to preach such things, are rapidly consigning them to a class of what are called spiritual allegories. I know that a majority still draw the line at the Incarnation and Resurrection. But the line is not a very firm one, and is often obliterated by zealous apostles of the "New Theology."

Premising so much, we find the analogy between the Bible stories and religious folklore all over the world to afford a strong presumption in favour of human evolution. Creation, Eden, the Deluge, propitiatory sacrifices, and even the death and resurrection of a deity are all commonly known in heathen religions. And if in Hebrew folklore the stories take, in some respects, a more refined form than in more primitive traditions, that is because they were edited late in the development of the Jewish nation, and were naturally remoulded according to the culture of the time. Further, the moral progress achieved by the influence of the Bible is just what we should expect from a process of human evolution, but utterly and hopelessly inconsistent with the intervention of an omnipotent God. For whether we accept or reject Budde's theory of a religion established by covenant at Sinai, the conduct of the conquering hordes who invaded Palestine from the south-east, uncommonly like that of the 'Abiri described in the, perhaps, contemporary letters found at Tel el Amarna,<sup>1</sup> was precisely what we should

<sup>1</sup> Of course I do not pretend to be an expert judge of such things. But the coincidence, or at any rate close likeness of the names, the near approximation in date—for what, in the loose chronology of those times, is a hundred years?—the direction of the invasion, and the utter inability of opposing scholars to say who the 'Abiri were, if they were not the Hebrews, seem very strong points. Such a terrible incursion as that described in the letters could not be a mere passing raid. And if not, what became of the 'Abiri? The most likely answer is that they remained as the Hebrews.

expect from a half-savage race who had agreed on a new cult, but who held it loosely, and who followed or abandoned it, just as they thought most expedient, in view of their belief in the surviving powers of the local gods, and of their doubt whether the newly adopted Jahweh would always be a match for those gods on their own ground. The alternative assumption of some stiff-necked perversity in the Hebrew, which made him always more disposed to worship the wrong god than the right one, is surely baseless. What we dimly discern in the many uncertainties of the Hebrew tradition is a very natural process in the course of which the desire to avoid aggravating the old gods of the new land was gradually, through the efforts of priests, prophets, and kings, superseded by persistent appeals to a covenant with Jahweh, whose worship proved in the end to have a higher moral worth.

The above must be taken as an illustration of what is meant by saying that "the phenomena of the Bible and the story of its relations to mankind are consistent with what we know of the processes of human evolution, but are not in the least suggestive of any miraculous revelation from a personal Being outside the world." To extend such illustrations further would only be to repeat what has been said in preceding chapters. But a word on the last part of the above sentence must be added. For, if anything so tremendous had occurred as the interference of an alleged Almighty Being with the order of the world for the purpose of saving man from his wicked ways, so potent an expedient must have had both immediate and permanent results. But history cannot be read like that at all; for religious and moral as well as social and scientific progress, have been gradual, generally in the



line of least resistance, and always accommodated to the changing conditions of natural human evolution. Of course there have been special times of crisis, times of exuberant growth, and times of stagnation. And I suppose it seems to many that the rapid spread of Christianity, mainly by the zeal of St Paul after the resurrection vision, is proof positive of miraculous intervention. But that has been already dealt with, and I will not return to it here. I would only remark that the whole course of Church history, from the beginning of the second century onward, is proof positive that the development of Christianity was an exceedingly human affair, and that if the exuberance of faith and brotherhood in the first century had been the work of direct divine intervention, its Almighty Author would certainly have prevented its submersion in heretical swamps of gnosticism and sectarian strife about words.

But, before leaving the first conclusion from considerations adduced in this work, I must guard myself against misinterpretation of the terms "natural" and "human evolution." For it is commonly supposed that they exclude God, while on the contrary they belong to a view of the world in which eventually we shall see nothing but God. With all respect for men who have done much to emancipate thought from superstition, I am unable to see in the advent of the human race the appearance of a causeless and independent consciousness capable not only of judging supposed imperfections in the world,<sup>1</sup> but of re-

<sup>1</sup> This is not the place to explain why I say "supposed imperfections." The notion of imperfection is generated by the preconception that the world was made to suit man's pleasure, while he finds that it does not always do so (see p. 297). The only sense in which I attribute perfection to the Universe is that its innumerable phases make one infinite Whole, such that each is necessary to all, and that no single part or

vising its constitution and rolling it in another course. For, whenever and however man appeared, he was evolved from pre-existing conditions, and remained absolutely dependent on the Eternal Life of which all things are phases. Moreover, the evolution of humanity never did and never can separate it from what, as Herbert Spencer said, "was before Humanity and before all other things." We may speak of this Eternal Being as Nature, as the Universe, or as God. But after the human race appeared in the earliest fully self-conscious and reasoning hordes, it was just as much a part of Nature as when it lay in embryo in the "pithecanthropus" or other such form; was still just as much dependent on the eternal life of the universe, or God, for the exercise of the new faculties acquired. And so it has continued ever since. As a phase of Nature, man has been subject to the influences of other phases of Nature, and, among them, to those of the Bible. But human evolution in this sense does not exclude God any more than does the natural evolution of a nightingale or a rose.

II. Our second conclusion is this: that the numerical insignificance of those tribes or nations who have lived within the influence of the Bible is entirely inconsistent with the conception of it as "the Word of God" to man-

phase could be destroyed or altered without destroying or mutilating the Whole. This, however, regarded from the human notion of time, is perfectly consistent with phenomenal changes such as make upon us the impression of "evolution." Nor is it inconsistent with social reform. The doctrine of the conservation of force should assure us that transmutation involves no radical or ultimate change in the substance of the finite phase or thing transmuted. The balance of parts and their ontological relation to the Whole remain the same. Perhaps the always residual difficulty lies in our finite incapacity for thinking of Eternity otherwise than as endless Time.

kind. The facts adduced in the course of this work compel us to assign to the Bible a place analogous to that of other tribal scriptures, such as the Vedas, Zendavesta, and Koran, each of which, to its own people, was a divine revelation, but which we all regard as having been produced by a natural process of human evolution. But we are perfectly free to consider the Bible superior to any of them if we find it so. If so, however, we must be content to regard that superiority as a difference of degree and not of kind. Moreover, we have to bear in mind that even amongst the small minority of the human race who have known the Bible, that knowledge was not, until quite recent times, direct, but only indirect, through the services of the Church. Exception must, of course, be made of the clergy, though even they, as Charlemagne complained, were often and for long periods very ignorant of the sacred text.

III. A Book such as this, known only to a small minority of mankind, and prized as conferring upon them some exclusive privileges, naturally acquired not only a sacredness, but such a power of divine guardianship as the Trojans attributed to their palladium, or such as more savage tribes ascribed each to their own particular fetish. This degradation of an interesting and in many parts noble and inspiring literature was aggravated when intelligent knowledge came to be considered unnecessary for the evocation of its powers, and the muttering of its syllables by an unlearned clergy was thought sufficient to appease God. It might be supposed that such a desecration of the Book could only be possible where conservative superstition insisted on the continued use in Church services of the dead languages, which even to many priests had become

unknown tongues. But the recent and perhaps not yet extinct custom to which I have alluded (p. 13) of posting up detached biblical texts in railway waiting-rooms, or employing "sandwich men" to carry them on boards through the streets, would have been impossible unless some tinge of fetishism had mingled with Protestant reverence for the Bible.

IV. This unfortunate perversion and degradation of the Bible has been gradual and incidental, not in the least caused by its own claims, or arising out of its own essential nature. The scribes who first gathered into a codex the traditional fragments of Mosaic law, believed, no doubt, in a vague manner that these relics originated in a divine sanction. But so did Hammurabi, when he compiled his code some thousand years before. And the compilers, distinguished by critics as primarily E and J, who embodied the law in an account of origins, had certainly no such awe of their sources of information as now overmasters the readers of Genesis, Exodus, and Joshua. It is, no doubt, difficult for the modern mind to put itself by imagination into the position of the ancients. For we now—wrongly—distinguish things secular and sacred, while to the ancients divine action was everywhere. To modern popular opinion some literature is sacred and the rest profane. But when letters and writing were a miracle, and were employed only in the service of the deity or his vicegerents, all writings were sacred. Yet this did not in the least imply such slavery to the letter as characterises modern bibliolatry. For each successive copyist had no scruple whatever about accommodating his predecessor's work to the needs or the taste of the new age. Thus the fetishistic awe in which the Old Testament was held by the later Jews, and the whole



Bible by Christians after the fourth century, was entirely unknown to the makers of the Book. In fact, the case of the Bible in this respect is entirely analogous to that of all other sacred books of the world, except the Koran. For this latter was issued full-fledged, as a sort of Jove's eagle, a messenger of God through his prophet. But the case of the other books already mentioned was entirely different. For they, like the Bible, were originally the embodiments of popular tradition, edited and re-edited by philosophers or scribes. And it was only after ages of custom that they reached the dignity or degradation of a fetish. We ought not, therefore, to allow the superstition of its ignorant devotees to prejudice us in our estimate of the value of this venerable Book.

V. It may be freely allowed that this apotheosis has given authority to the best parts of the Bible, and that they have thus gained in power over the minds and consciences of men. Of this I have given illustrations in the first chapter and elsewhere. But a fatal nemesis has followed, in that the same power and authority have been given to the worst and most demoralising parts of the Book. If the late Psalmist tells us that, "Like as a father pitieth his children, so Jahweh pitieth them that fear him," the earlier compiler of his people's history tells us that the same Jahweh<sup>1</sup> said to Abraham, "Take now thy son, thine only son, Isaac, whom thou lovest . . .

<sup>1</sup> In the compilation out of two older documents, or in the later editing of the story, the name Jahweh has been introduced where apparently Elohim alone formerly stood (Carpenter and Battersby). But I have only to do with the Bible as authorised by the Church. The rescue of Isaac by an angel is little to the point. It cannot cancel the fact that a human sacrifice—the sacrifice of an only son—was thought a demand proper for the deity to make.

and offer him for a burnt-offering." The lawgivers and judges of all Christian ages until comparatively recent times defended by Bible texts their savage penalties inflicted on crazy old women convicted of an impossible crime. Contemporary hymn-books are still full of pagan superstitions about the power of blood to propitiate God. And recently, within my knowledge, a child, attending a summer morning service on the seashore, who, in answer to a question about the best way of getting to heaven, said she must live a good and loving life, was told, No, that was not right; she must be "Sprinkled with the blood of Jesus." What sense the young Oxford zealot conducting the service attached to these materialistic words, it is difficult to conceive. But he was, of course, amply justified by the religious instruction which led him to attach an equal value to the Bible's coarsest phrases and most spiritual flights. Such are only typical instances of the modes in which the Bible has been degraded into a fetish.

VI. The parts of the Bible really authoritative are so because they call attention to self-evident truth, and not at all because they contain any "revealed word of God." And no "higher criticism," or any controversy about the authenticity of books, or the historicity of miracles, has the slightest tendency to lessen the authority of such utterances as these. We may, indeed, have to make allowance for differences between far distant ages in mental habit and choice of language to express substantially identical thought. Yet this does not hinder our acceptance of the Sermon on the Mount, 1 Cor. xiii., Rom. xii., and such passages as words of eternal life. But this is not because they were spoken by Christ or written by his

first followers ; it is because they touch the heart as self-evident truth.<sup>1</sup>

Nor is the Old Testament wanting in such passages which gain rather than lose authority as true freedom of thought prevails. The "Ten Commandments" cannot, for reasons previously adduced, be reckoned among such passages. Yet some of them, such as "Thou shalt not kill" and "Thou shalt not steal" — against which the whole action of Church and State since Constantine has been one constant rebellion — seem to be coming into more honour now precisely in proportion as all belief in their supernatural origin dies away. For humanitarian legislation and the belated movement in favour of "peace on earth" look like an adoption of the former, with certain reserves, by natural morality ; while contemporary social reforms consist largely in an application of the latter to the depredations of the successful rich.<sup>2</sup> But happily there are, in the Old Testament, better illustrations than the Ten Commandments of self-evident moral truth. For instance, when the Psalmist asks who is worthy of the divine presence—which to Spinoza would mean "the intellectual love of God"—he replies, "He that

<sup>1</sup> In applying this to the Sermon on the Mount, of course ample allowance has to be made for orientalisms and a habit of arresting attention by paradox. But those who regard it as utterly unpractical, have not sufficiently considered the cases of George Fox, or, a far better man, John Woolman and a host of the early Quakers.

<sup>2</sup> This is especially the case with land law reform, which seeks, as yet very inadequately, to remedy the cruel and monstrous wrong inflicted on the vast majority of the community through the appropriation by a few of the land on which all must live. This does not mean the abolition of private *holding*, nor the division of the land into unworkable fractions. But it does mean a sufficient payment by the few landed to the many landless, through taxation, for the privilege enjoyed by the former. There is no conceivable revival of the eighth commandment which would do more good than this.

walketh uprightly and speaketh the truth in his heart. He that backbiteth not with his tongue, nor doeth evil to his neighbour," and so forth. It is certainly not because the nameless Psalmist says these things, still less because we suppose the words to have been dictated by God, that our hearts respond to such words. Their worth is self-evident. There are very many other golden sayings in the Old Testament, such as depend for their authority neither on miracle nor revelation. On some of them, no doubt, rationalists inevitably differ, because they are either bent upon the impossible task of excluding God from human thought, or else they have not settled within themselves what meaning should be attached to the name. But to Spinoza the prophet's words, "Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace whose mind is stayed on thee, because he trusteth in thee," would be self-evident, and indeed it pervaded all his experience. He, however, knew what he meant by God, and was always at peace under curses, persecution, and poorly paid labour, because he was freely acting out the divine idea in himself as a part of the perfect Whole which was God. Such doctrines of the Bible are gaining in authority, not losing it, as the legends of a miraculous revelation die away. And the Bible writers had a way of putting them such as will always appeal to the feelings of "the wayfaring man" with a directness that no philosophic moralist can attain.

Very different is the case with such religious doctrines as have been received only because "revealed." Perhaps the best illustration we can take is the fetishistic conception of sin, just now a subject of acute controversy between the Old and the New Theology. For, according to the old notion, sin is something worse than doing evil to one's neighbour or the commonwealth. Whether the Rev.



R. J. Campbell is absolutely right in identifying it simply and exclusively with selfishness, I will not undertake to say. And the point is not important. But people of rational religion are much indebted to him for the earnestness and incisive force with which he has taught through his sermons and books the superstitious absurdity of supposing that there could be any such thing as sin against God in the sense that it is God's sanctity alone that suffers or is desecrated thereby. As I understand him, he holds that God is only affected by wrong-doing indirectly, through his creatures who are injured thereby. This is something very different from the savage's notion that his fetish is vexed and wronged by the introduction of something "taboo" into the precincts of the sacred hut; very different also from the ecclesiastical notion that not only is humanity wronged, but a divine presence is desecrated by a murder or a suicide within a consecrated shrine. The whole so-called Law of Holiness, incorporated after the Captivity with the Pentateuch, is instinct with this fetishistic idea that God could be the direct object of man's improprieties or wrong-doing. And hence was generated first the Jewish and then the Christian notion of sin, of which, however, I am thankful to say, I can find no trace in the most probably genuine teaching of the Founder himself. This superstition of sin, as something worse than wrong-doing to God's creatures, depends altogether on traditional theophanies or revelations in which the local or national god claims for himself a special awe and reverence belonging to no self-evident moral code, and dependent for its enforcement only on misinterpretations of Nature. For thunderbolts, plague, pestilence, and famine were supposed to be the sanctions of this sacred horror, and to magnify the sin against the

god above any wrong done to man. The manifest decay of this baseless belief is the best illustration I can give of the neglect into which all doctrines are falling that depend upon evidence of miracle or supernatural revelation. Beyond this it is needless to allude to the rapid break-up of creeds about Trinities and Incarnations and Atonements. I use the plural advisedly, for there are now as many different interpretations of them as there are clergy schools.

VII. Another conclusion which I cannot help drawing—and I do so with renewed expression of obligation to pioneers whom I may think misguided, but must always respect—is that the best defence of bibliolatry has consisted in the extravagances of “rationalists,” who make a dead set against our Bible, and while allowing much value to the code of Hammurabi—extensively adopted in the Pentateuch—and to the scriptures of the Aryan invaders of India, as well as to the Buddhist writings, and even to the Koran—largely a plagiarism from Judaism and Christianity—can yet see nothing whatever in the Bible but a record of human folly exploited in the interests of designing priests. Let us have fair play even when the Bible is the game. Happily there are many rationalists of a more judicial mind, and Mr Charles T. Gorham, in his *Ethics of the Great Religions*, has well shown how the Jewish and Christian Scriptures advocate at least no lower an ideal than other sacred books of the nations. But the bitterness of other so-called “rationalistic” writers, and their blindness to the fact that the Jewish and Christian Scriptures, equally with the sacred writings of other religions, are normal, natural, and honest examples of human evolution, have done much to prejudice religious people against their arguments, and have, so far, strengthened the defences of “the faith.”

VIII. My final word is that the Bible is not dead, but has an indefinite if not immortal life before it ; for the entire abandonment of supernatural claims, so far from lessening its influence in the coming age, will confirm and extend it. True it is that my poor friend referred to in the first chapter, and the millions of whom he was a type, could find no use for the Bible if it was not to them the Word of God. But even then there were solitary souls who thought it much more precious as the word of man. And if it be true, as I think it is, that moral and social evolution are largely dependent on stored experience, surely that storage of experience is most effective which is most accessible to the "common people" whom Jesus loved. Now, I know that there have been and still survive, epics and folk-songs and folklore which store up, sometimes in beautiful, sometimes in strange and repulsive forms, the moral and social experience of past times. But explain it how we may, there was something in the Hebrew genius which enabled it to express the moral and spiritual experience of successive ages in forms which had a singular attractiveness for the mixed races with whom lay the moulding of the future world. That its history was false, its morality often imperfect, and in its earlier records repugnant, is now extensively admitted. But that did not prevent its better portions from stimulating the moral sense of simple souls who traced to Adam's disobedience all our woe, and who were incapable of picturing evolution, or the working of the world's eternal life, as other than the struggles of a divine Being with a recalcitrant race for whom he designed a miraculous plan of salvation.

But what of the times when there shall be no more such simple souls, when everyone will recognise that God and

the Universe are one, and that the only inspiration is the world's eternal life, however various the forms it may take? Will the Bible then be useless, or only a curious relic for students of forgotten lore? If I think not, perhaps this may, with some plausibility, be attributed to the fact that since I could read at all, the Book has scarcely been out of my hands, and that at every step in my advance toward a purer faith than that of earlier years, I have found in it the "seeds immortal" of the grandest human hopes. But there are reasons outside personal experience for thinking as I do. For instance, Spinoza recommends that short sentences compressing into a few words decisive moral principles should be memorised, so that we may always readily recur to them whenever occasion may arise.<sup>1</sup> Of course it is to be understood that such moral principles have already become at times matters of experience, and have been found to work. Thus the words of Brutus in Shakespeare's *Julius Cæsar*: "Be patient till the last," will recur to many troubled minds, irrespective of their immediate context, and yet laden with all the meaning of human impatience rebuked by events. So, in fits of ill temper or rash condemnation of the eternal order, the recalled words sound like the knell of slain self-confidence, and bring, if not happiness, at least peace. Again, when Hamlet, either mad or sane, let fall the words "There is nothing either good or bad, but thinking makes it so,"<sup>2</sup> he pronounced, concerning the

<sup>1</sup> *Ethics*, Part v., Prop. x., Scholium.

<sup>2</sup> The memory instantly recurs to the contradiction contained in the words:

"O who can hold a fire in his hand  
By thinking on the frosty Caucasus?"

Both passages are true to human nature, but that quoted in the text is more salutary.



power of the mind over the body, an aphorism which anticipated by several generations not only quack methods of "faith healing" and so-called "Christian Science," but the more sober truth realised in the legitimate practice of medicine, that a sound mind can often do much to preserve or even restore a sound body. And in many moods of ill-humoured discontent the recollection of the words brings alleviation if not a cure.

Now, if this be so, what an exhaustless mine of moral wealth, and what unfathomable sources of inspiration, must ever remain for the "common people" in the Bible's noblest words! Shakespeare has never been handicapped by a superstitious ascription to him of miraculous inspiration or infallibility, and therefore he passes through every age like a star through changing clouds, his brightness above reach of evanescent vapours. And when the Bible comes to be taken simply for what it is worth, as the outcome not of a single, but of a racial genius, with a strange power to touch the souls of the Western peoples, its disembarassment from a weight of impossible doctrines will discover to us that "touch of nature" which "makes the whole world kin," and, to quote its own metaphors, its "word will have free course and be glorified." Then the unlearned man will no longer be perplexed by an obligation to accept Oriental paradoxes, metaphors, and folklore as prosaic facts. The return to something of the simplicity of childhood will no longer be barred by fantastic doctrines of an impossible rebirth. The declaration that the "Son of Man came not to be ministered unto but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many" will not be darkened by an odious superstition of propitiation, but will be called to mind when a brave coal-miner sacrifices his life to save his

fellows, or the captain of a foundering ship, with the way of escape open to him, sees everyone else safe and dies at his post. The Psalmist's exhortation to "Trust in the Lord and do good" will not have less but greater force when "the Lord" is taken as the Universe itself in all the plenitude of its eternal life and order.

In fact, the Bible teems with pregnant utterances such as the wayfaring man may use in accordance with Spinoza's advice,<sup>1</sup> provided only that when complete in themselves, they may be taken apart from the context, and in entire independence of the supernatural complications in which tradition may have involved them. It is futile to scout such a natural use of the Bible as impossible or ineffectual; (*solvitur ambulando*). Thousands who love the Bible are using it in no other way now, and they will soon become millions. It may be true that the ultimate truth of Pantheism can scarcely enter into the world-view (*Weltanschauung*) of the multitude for generations to come. But their ideas, to adopt the venerable Tolstoy's phrase, of "what they call God" are constantly expanding and must ultimately include the "All in all." Meantime many biblical aphorisms, proverbs, and other pregnant words expressing the will of "what they call God" concerning the higher manhood bring that will very "nigh them in their heart and in their mouth that they may do it." Thus, from Abraham's inception of a peace policy, "Let there be no strife, I pray thee, between me and thee . . . for we be brethren," to the bold words of Jesus—"I say unto you, love your enemies"—the whole Bible, notwithstanding the savagery of much in its earlier parts, is full of brief sayings that prepare us for a time when men

<sup>1</sup> As is well known, Spinoza assigned to the Bible a morally regulative function, and not a power of revelation.

shall learn war no more. Though, as I have admitted, the Ten Commandments are weak in regard to truthfulness, yet, from the time when the moral consciousness of Israel had developed far enough to recognise that God "desires truth in the inward parts" to the declaration of the Seer in Revelation that into the perfect social state there shall in nowise enter "anything that maketh a lie," there are abundant brief utterances sharp enough to sting, if it were possible, the conscience of the modern Pharisee. And though the old Testament has too many passages lurid with blood feuds, sanguinary bigotry, and cruel deeds supposed to please God, yet, from the command in Leviticus, "Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself," to the unknown Ephesian mystic's words, "God is love, and he that dwelleth in love dwelleth in God and God in him," the Bible as a whole abounds in passages calculated to prepare men for the triumph of rational socialism<sup>1</sup> in the Kingdom of God or Republic of Man.

The evolution of man will some day be universally regarded not as a series of catastrophes, or divine interventions, creating disconnected epochs, but as a graduated and self-consistent process. That process can never, indeed, be rightly conceived as a separate, self-contained whole, having a clearly conceived beginning and a definite end. But at least, to our human apprehension, it will simulate unity within its finite proportions as part of an infinite Whole. When this view of human evolution

<sup>1</sup> Between rational socialism and communism there is a great difference. Readers of the above and other previous forecasts of ultimate religion must perhaps again be reminded that I have not overlooked the suffering that is in the world. But on that I can only again refer to Spinoza's doctrine of "inadequate ideas." It does not come within the scope of this work. But I have treated of it elsewhere, in *Spinoza: A Handbook to the Ethics*, Constable & Co., Ltd.

becomes universal, no one will think of eliminating the Bible as a notable and influential factor among the influences that have made the foremost races what they are. The superstitious belief natural to the childhood of man, that here we have a message from a manlike God, of which every word is true, will indeed have evaporated into the cloudless sky of a brighter intellectual day. But equally superstitious will seem the notion entertained by a few sciolists intoxicated with a partial emancipation from authority, that this great literature is merely the work of designing priestcraft and interested fraud. On the contrary, the Bible will always keep its place as the most precious treasure ever inherited by any "people of the Book," and will vindicate more and more against its ignorant, misled, or wilful misinterpreters of the past, its claim to be a still living record of the struggle of man toward purity, freedom, and light.



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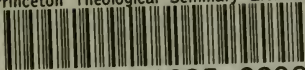








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